

**Rewind** • Posted 59 minutes ago

## **20 Dispatches You Can't Believe Your Future Self Is Sending You**

And just wait till you see #17



by **Joe Gurba**  
BuzzFeed Clickbait Consultant

Last updated on November 29, 2020, at 11:52 p.m. MST  
Posted on February 15, 2020, at 11:59 p.m. MST

—2—

---

DISPATCH  
CAN'T  
YOUR  
SELF  
SENDING

by

joe

0  
ES YOU  
BELIEVE  
FUTURE  
IS  
YOU  
gurba

© 2021 Calvin Joseph Gurba

Joe Gurba

20 Dispatches You Can't Believe  
Your Future Self Is Sending You

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the author.

This book is technically a work of fiction (or *the lie through which we tell the truth*, if Camus is to be trusted), so if you wish to sue me because 'names or characters or places or incidents' strike too close to home, so be it. How's a preamble going to stop you? One might even argue that the predictive power of fiction is self-fulfilling. I stand with Oscar Wilde in believing "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life." If that's true, books really are dangerous things. Perhaps that's why they're fashioned from such flammable materials? In this particular book, the developments of 2015 to 2020 are expanded from their present drama to fulfill their possible conclusions. With the world-shaping-power-of-Art in mind, it shouldn't be a surprise if conclusions in this book come to 'resemble actual events or locales or persons, living or dead.' Nevertheless, I'd be remiss not to limit my liability by here stating that such resemblances are 'entirely coincidental.'

Published by: Open Apartment Publishing Collective

Text Design by: Calvin Joseph Gurba

Cover Design by: Calvin Joseph Gurba

ISBN-10: 1-7777152-0-5

ISBN-13: 978-1-7777152-0-5

Printed and bound in Montreal by  
Marquis Book Printing

For Ruth.



**Rewind** • Posted 59 minutes ago

## **20 Dispatches You Can't Believe Your Future Self Is Sending You**

And just wait till you see #17



by **Joe Gurba**  
BuzzFeed Clickbait Consultant

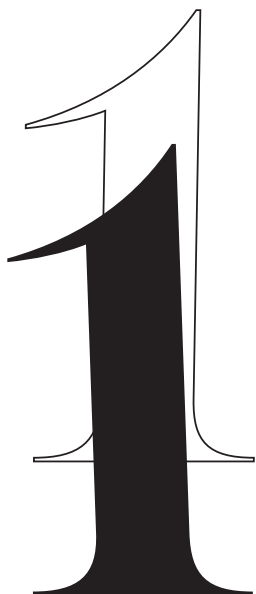
Last updated on November 29, 2020, at 11:52 p.m. MST

Posted on February 15, 2020, at 11:59 p.m. MST

Dear 2015 Joe,  
*please read carefully.*  
In the year 2020, the following  
developments were noteworthy.







A new supply of temporary foreign workers has arrived to staff the milk factory while a team of designers quibble over font and font-weight for the press release. Fixed width certainly, all else is hotly contested.

- A. 3D printing<sup>1</sup> is running the sneaker factories out of business. “Sneakers!? More like *squeakers*,” quips the cat-hair-covered grandma in the dairy aisle, staring at my fresh kicks, voice muffled by a mask. Her grass-green basket’s full of earplugs, Aspirin™, milk.
- B. Waves of workers squeak off the red-eye:
  - i. Scurry to the bathroom, dazed by the high-perched thrones that flush automatically.

---

1 More like 4D printing, it takes forever! And the printers keep breaking. And they buzz like locusts.

- ii. Pause outside the airport, drink in the rich resinous smoke of forest fires, mingled majestically with deep fryer fans and jet fuel exhaust. Sickly sweet. Warm and ticklish in the lungs. Such dazzling smoke, as if scheduled and paid for by Michael Bay's lighting effects and set design team. It casts an Instagram™ filter over the land. Tints the setting sun a peachy Millennial pink.
  - iii. A worker is fined for smoking within ten metres of the terminal door.
- C. Sommeliers placate dining designers convinced their red is riddled with smoke taint.
- D. The designers drop everything and gather for an emergency conference room meeting:
- Mr. Peanut™ has died!<sup>2</sup> We must tweet some riotous eulogy that reflects our brand—the on-trend dairy with the most social media engagement and viral content in today's competitive milk landscape.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Peanut™, the 104-year-old Planters™ mascot and cafeteria pariah, dies a gruesome death in February 2020. A few days later, in a \$5.6m Superbowl ad, he's mourned graveside by a pantheon of brand mascots. Spoiler alert: Mr Peanut™ arises reborn from his own grave plot when the tears of the Kool-Aid Man™ sob onto the soil. In its own corporately calculated, innocuous way, this mindless campaign somehow presages all that is to follow the ides of March one moon later.

E. Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.  
My hands are sacred, my hands are terrible. My  
face becometh the priceless work of art, forbidden  
to touch, camouflaged behind a sky blue sky blue. I  
breathe my own hot breath.

Corona™ bottle filled with artisanal hand-sani, stuffed with a mask, or a rag torn from a Confederate flag.

A lighter.

*(frustrated by the same wind that will fan the flames. )*



Nothing has been forgiven.

Our loan applications grow longer, stranger, and more penetrating than you can imagine with your 2015 brain, Joey. The questions seem like weird non-sequiturs but you get a fuzzy sense of their underlying logic, a sense that all this data knows us better than we've known ourselves. You can answer their questions however you like. They know if you'll pay, even if you lie.

- A. This all started when financial actuaries harnessed AI and machine-learning to “*ring in a new age for prophecy*,” in the historic words of *WIRED Magazine*.<sup>3</sup>

---

3 How does it work? The *Prophets* algorithms dredge the mire of ones and zeros we drop behind us day after day (you agreed to this in your terms of service). They crunch all of mankind's digitized doings—all art, all memes, all 23-and-me's, our limitless security footage (seen or unseen), our likes

It wasn't long before people started calling these actuaries the *Prophets*. A lot of kids want to grow up to be *Prophets*.

- B. These loan applications have blossomed into fascinating works of post-deconstructionist poetry in-and-of-themselves. *Les fleurs des bureaux*.

---

and our shares, our excess bureaucratia and our anthologized works, no matter how banal or profound, canonized or otherwise. Then they appraise our debt. These machine-learners can then correlate every idle utterance—all that we've *said*—back to everything we've actually *done*, zip zap zaa, buffered and stuffed.

Having computed our history thus, the *Prophets*' algorithms know us the way dogs know that high pitch hum we are oblivious to.

The brilliant leap was to let the machines start formulating their own lending questions. Believe me, Joe, it's magic to witness what the machine finds meaningful. If it says you will pay, you *will* pay. Miraculous.

And if you want credit, you must turn up and answer. It's a bottomless time hole, yes, but we make it fun! People do the loan applications on Tinder dates or as icebreaker games at parties. Or we send our answers back and forth to one another in the *Prophets*' super addictive gamified app, *Loans With Friends*.

You see folks young and old hack away at their applications on the daily commute and wonder how much time this is sapping from our lives, but you can't deny how inspiring it feels to look around and get the sense that everyone is writing their memoirs in real-time.

Most people actually love answering these weird AI queries, assured their replies will not go unheard or misheard but instead be evaluated evenly by an impartial and all-knowing gatekeeper. It's so heartening to know your work will be read and reviewed at all in an age when everyone's writing so often it's almost impossible to find readers. Even if your reader is just a loan machine, even if all it's doing is squaring your answers with all recorded history, at least you'll know if you've been approved.

- C. There is no written “word” in 2020 more juicy than the underscored line, \_\_\_\_\_, imploring you to fill in the blank.
- D. The *Prophets* have revived the world’s best print artists, artisanal papermakers, and origami masters to consult on these applications. Their svelte texture, raised ink, and eggshell sheen are a pleasure to handle. The way they caress your fingertips and bend in your hand, their heft and finish, it’s like the weight of another hand holding yours.
- E. Pinterest.gov.edu™ has popularized wallpapering with the loan applications, you see them wheat-pasted all over the bathrooms of hip restaurants and barber shops and pop-up craft fairs (they elicit location-tagged selfies). It frustrates the collectors.
- F. Here’s an example of the applications’ strange questions, these ones taken from the *CAPITAL ONE INTEREST-FREE OBSIDIAN KNIFE CARD®* application I was working on before bed last night:
- *What is your favourite vignette in NBC’s The Office?:*  
When Jim’s *Second Life™* avatar has a guitar.
  - *For real though?:*  
When Jim looks at the camera, Niagara Falls.
  - *What’s your karaoke song if the Booze Cruise (s2e11) is sinking?:*  
Billy Joel’s *We Didn’t Start the Fire*.
  - *How good are you at vuvuzela?:*  
I found one lodged in the snow on my walk to the dollar-store and gave it a go. A passing dog-walker praised my talent. Their puppies howled along. They

said what a damned shame it would be if I didn't pursue a career in vuvuzela. It sure felt good to be good at something, but I couldn't stomach the noise and my cheeks ached like I'd been blowing up balloons all day. I put it back where I found it.

- *Do you consider yourself a man/woman of letters and if so, what do you predict will be considered the dominant form of discourse by future historians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Yes. Trolling.

- *Tell us about your dog.:*

He's a black Tibetan mastiff named Minotaur that I rescued from a dog breeder for \$5,000.

- *What're your thoughts on the path of least resistance?:*

I don't know! It's the only path left? Can such a path exist in a hermeneutically sealed labyrinth? It's like an IKEA™ showroom in here! And even if we squeeze out of the artifice or the edifice, is it not too hot out for us Daedeluses and Icaruses to lift off the ground before our wings have melted? What do you want me to say? I need this credit card! I can't afford yarn and I'm in desperate need of a sweater. I'm not a *Pyrosopher* if that's what you're asking.

- *If the apple tree in your backyard grew so large it became the key source of nourishment for billions of people, but its size began to alter the swing of the earth, the height of the tides, the path of the wind, would you:*

- a) Leave it be and adapt to the consequences?*
- b) Start pruning and hope for the best?*
- c) Saw it down for firewood and lumber?*
- d) Take a clipping and terraform Mars?*

That depends, do the apples still have seeds or is this one of the ones we engineered that out of?

- *How do you identify?:*

As a self-flagellating, unoppressed, privileged, white, cisgendered, straight, able-bodied, young male—who despite his best efforts is convincingly condemned by his favourite social theorists to be inescapably and irredeemably ignorant, ungrateful, racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, ableist, and ageist—dwelling on stolen land, who was born too poor or too lazy or too incompetent to convert any of his immeasurable advantages into enough money to buy any of the stolen land from the descendants of the dirt-poor thieves that outran class oppression to first plunder it and first cough and first deal in bad faith and first trudge west before winter and first live in dirt hovels and first pull the trees and first pick the rocks and first till the land and first plant their crops earlier than my coward family could, and now I’m too well off to beg and too underwater to not give up and finally consolidate all my debts under this one Obsidian Knife card—if I can ever figure out who all I’m indebted to.

- *Where did you last weep real tears of joy?:*

Las Vegas.

**YOU MUST BE VERY CREATIVELY HONEST TO GET CREDIT**



- G. So now confessional poetry's all the rage—or *the tits*, as the kids say—and without realizing it everyone is doing it all of the damned time, for the *Prophets* require this, causing the last dregs of our so-called 'real' poets, confessional or otherwise, to throw their books in the air, tear at their tunics, and recite Whitman on grass-green milk crates through dollar-store bullhorns, pleading for some goddamned *discipline*, for poems that aren't the goddamned *loan applications*, losing their goddamned *minds* when passersby say *I love spoken word!*
- H. If you want the milk and honey, Joey, you'd better figure out fast which side your bread is buttered on, to put it cutely.
- I. Truths are now best conveyed cutely, cushioned by sweaty-smiley emojis—it's all the rage (or *the tits*, whoops), and you'll be more likely to get approved by the algorithms. [ SWEATY-SMILEY EMOJI ]



They had to tranquilize the big cats at all the zoos and declaw them with a rotary sander, I swear to God. Not sure why. Not sure if it worked.



Joey boy, relax! Over these five years, we've found moderate success as a freelance clickbait copy editor and consultant.<sup>4</sup> Nowadays I pop down to Las Vegas whenever I can afford to. At first, it was for keynotes at content creator conferences, but now I can't relax anywhere else. 2020 Vegas is as sensible as it is sensory.

---

4 I also made some decent money kickstarting my philosopher action figures: Marx, Hegel, Arendt, Socrates, Foucault, so many fun collectibles! Like-new one's are worth a mint on eBay now. Kinda feel bad for some of the professors and grad students that actually took them out of their boxes and played with them. (The people that didn't open theirs successfully argued that they nevertheless got just as much fun out of deconstructing the term *action figures*; another online reviewer mused that I ought to come out with some *praxis figures*, maybe that would do the trick.)

- A. *Las Vegas* means *the meadows* or *the pastures*. I am no Goliath-killer but the Lord sure makes me lie down there, beside the sometimes quiet sometimes orgasmic waters of the Bellagio fountain.<sup>5</sup>
- B. You'll know you've made it when you're on camera so often your reflection in the mirror seems backward. It is. But it isn't.
- C. A new kind of seer has emerged, a kiosk on the strip called *The Oracle of Delphi*, right in front of the Mirage, dressed in all the tack and trappings of a faux-Victorian crystal ball & palm reading salon. You leap into the sacred space with fear and trembling. Inside towers a monolithic black column *à la* Space Odyssey, whirring with processors and cooling fans. It features a single red light that glows like a far-flung star imploding. It dwarfs you. Then you take off your mask, Venmo™ the thing some Bitcoin, and the tower asks you what you'd like to know. Seeing as there's so much idle talk of revolution these days, I asked the tower its thoughts on the topic. As it does, the tower (not so much purrs as it) growls to life, reviews every iota of revolution-related data from the dark web to the ivory tower, and produces its cryptic poetry. It's tremendous fun! And when you're done hearing your poem, a small crevasse opens in the floor before the monolith and weed vape drifts up from the ground while you reenact the kneeling Pythian priestess. I got Siri™ to transcribe the poem for you, Joey, in case you're still some kind of Marxist:

---

5 You will see the waterworks choreographed to Bocelli & Brightman's *Time to Say Goodbye* and not understand until much too late how meaningful it is.

## ON REVOLUTION

The Casino is bankrupt, a *fait accompli*,  
A *coup de chance*—dumb luck's revolution.

We all hit it! All at once! Everyone won

—*what are the odds?*

Can the blinded cyclops thread a needle?

Can two fishermen net Leviathan?

Can a Steinway dropped down the escalator  
tickle out *Sympathy for the Devil*?

—*no one could have hoped.*

Every starved beast outside could hear  
our drunken roar rattle the chandeliers,  
every slot a siren, a strobe, a gushing  
mint, baffled pit bosses sending for chips,  
every table turning out the clay heft  
of plenty. A rainbow arcs toward us  
as every tooth in every smile blazes,  
the pot of gold unveiled, the curtain torn,  
our voices ballooning, fat with splendour,  
this woozy jubilation, this swooning release.

Then our sour reveal: the crowded rostrum,  
the uncanny luck dealt out evenly.

In a half minute, the house went bust.

We were filthy rich now, all of us.

It was a dull raw taste, winning

what no one lost.

A hair in our spaghetti. The chuckling sighs  
when each of us realized:

I am not the only one.

We wound down the plush red aisles like a snake  
digesting (our jaws resetting), queued up  
for the cash cage, limbs languid in our  
postcoital fog. The din of Dean Martin  
resurfaced, *Volare*. I saw the vault,  
                heavy as a planet,  
dumped out like a plastic piggy bank  
slashed at the belly. Even the fine art  
was surrendered in lieu of cash, Warhol's  
*Repent & Sin No More*, Hirst's great white shark  
assundered, even Koons' shiny balloon  
figures were smashed and hauled off in small  
souvenir sized pieces—we took it all.

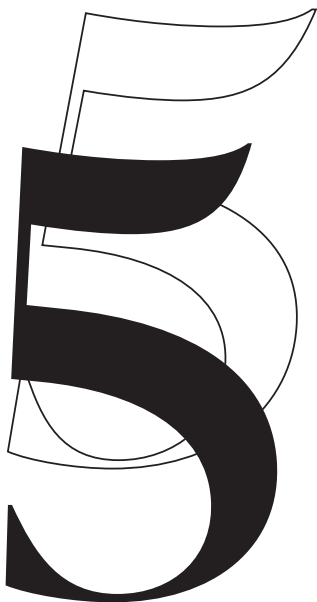
Now, at last,  
with the doors propped open,  
we light smokes out front,  
basking in the blacklight and neon buzz,  
glassy-eyed, gratified, adrift in a calm,  
in a mélange of perfume and cologne,  
sons and daughters of every tongue.  
Moon unseen but moon is there,  
no one seems to mind,  
our sight adapting to the dim of night.

The jig is up. The smoke is passed.  
Each of us quietly blows our O.  
Gershwin twinkles out the propped door,  
*They Can't Take That Away From Me.*  
We can't hear the sound of growling,  
the rumbling in our gut, the hunger. Not yet.

Inside the cavernous Casino  
the last die rolls to a stop, Sisyphus retiring  
with the dealer. The bartender free pours  
a scotch, scraping back a bar stool  
for Tantalus, emancipated.  
The roulette wheel glimmers to a halt  
on double-zero. Ixion meets us outside,  
bums a dart.

Our smoke rings mingle,  
dwindling up, up, up to a winking moon  
hidden behind our Sistine fumes,  
each of us Gyges now seen through,  
this cannot go on forever.

On the boulevard out front  
of the office towers adjacent,  
a few rabbits gnaw nervously,  
ready to run.



“What does it all mean?!” you will ask your now deceased orange tabby, basking sphinxly in the bay window, on the back of the suede chesterfield, a ball of gold woollen yarn beside him, listening to *Gymnopédies*.<sup>6</sup>

- A. He pans over, placidly, slow as time, and peers into you, gives you his gaze. A dispatch of sunlight forms a glittering corona at the inscrutable boundary of his warm black cornea. A solar eclipse. Speaks a silent, becalmed, domestic reply:

---

<sup>6</sup> You know these well by now, yes Joe? Three piano pieces by French avant-garde composer Erik Satie. You’ll still love these in 2020, but you’ll scoff that a war dance could be so restrained.



- i. “Philosophy is not the work of answering. It is the groping, mucking, sandy clam-dig for ever the better question, forever.”
  - a. *But I didn’t ask about philosophy.*
- B. Jackal-headed Anubis, guard of the underworld, abandons post and runs amok among the living, judges people before their time, demands answers for everything from everybody, calls everyone to account prematurely, weighing their hearts against a quill. I see him right now, at a café bar near the university—he’s very publicly and theatrically mansplaining the restraining order he now hands to a Sphinx. The Sphinx suppresses her instinct to strangle, tries to dispute the order calmly, rationally, but is shouted down by a spontaneous crowd of protesters.
- C. The Sphinx files a formal complaint to the authorities stating: (1) Anubis has abandoned guard at the gates of the underworld and is roaming the living and harassing the Sphinxes; and (2) he is everywhere answering questions no one is posing, across all of civilization! He’s crowded the skylines and bandwidth and silence with so many unprompted answers there’s hardly a drop of ink left to form the shepherd’s crook over my question marks. And (3) hasn’t anyone noticed the dead are escaping and the living are sneaking into the underworld—that the most ancient and solid of lines is melting to air!? Yesterday I saw a Google™ street maps car cruising around down below! Moreover, (4) the Sphinxes are already banned from almost all public space, and now this restraining order!? I’ll have nowhere left to go *but* the underworld, to riddle with the canonized. And

the living will have to visit me there among the dead, which really undermines the whole Sphinx bit if I can't strangle those who dare to answer.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, (5) I don't know who to take this up with, but mankind has no time in the day left to hear my questions. They want answers, demand them, and each answer they get leads to another one of their own dismal questions, taking them further down their blind path, and it's clear these antisphinxes they query, Siri™ and Alexa™ and the Google™ or whatever, they don't truly grasp the *essence* of the questions being asked them! And these people are heads-down wandering off one by one into a message board wilderness like lost sheep. Please toss out this restraining order and let me do my work. Signed, a concerned Sphinx.

- D. Another of the countless excruciating Tinder dates overheard by the bartender, this one devolved like so:
- You know Satie's *Gymnopédies*?
  - Of course.
  - OK, well did you know the *Gymnopaedia* was an annual Spartan celebration where the youth nakedly flaunted their athletic and martial genius through *war dancing*? And feasted for days after? Did you know?
  - OK, well did you know Erik Satie had an affair with Suzanne Valadon the year after she took up the paintbrush? You know her? She painted women—stern women, exhausted women, fed up—her eye

---

<sup>7</sup> As the living have never died in the underworld, despite their universal fear of this.

was brilliant, a glittering corona at the inscrutable boundary of subject and object. Did you know about her??

- Of course, but did you know that Satie proposed marriage to Valadon after their first night in bed? She said no, but she did move into the room next door on Rue Cortot, you know it? In Montmartre. Did you know that!? What the hell, right?
- Of course I knew that, but did you ever stop to consider that a festival for war dancing might not have been something Valedon would see as worthy of celebration or commemoration, that if you're not careful it could lead to all-out war? The real thing! Perhaps she couldn't be married to such a man?? Did you ever consider that??
- Well did you ever consider we need those festivals to *prevent* a great deal more bloodshed?? These games, these dances, these rituals of reenactment... do you even realize how overcome Satie was with Valadon? So quaking in the ruthless hands of love, he wrote the *Danses Gothiques* to *calm* himself! His worst piece, wouldn't you agree!? And you know what the Goths are famous for! He never loved again! He never loved again!! Did you know that!!!?
- Everyone knows that!!!—  
[in unison]
- *You think you're better than me!!?*
- E. Just as man supplanted the cat as an object of worship, so the dog has supplanted them both in 2020. "What does it all mean?!" you ask your \$5,000 Tibetan mastiff. "Woof."



The Earth is flat again.

- A. Science is dead. And we have killed it. How shall we comfort ourselves, the dissectors of all dissectors? What was most observable and repeatable has withered to death under our microscopes: who will wipe this petri dish clean? What disinfectant is there for us to sterilize our tools? What global conferences, what fact-checking panel, what peer-reviewed journals shall our governments fund? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become scientists simply to appear worthy of it?<sup>8</sup>
- B. But when Alex Jones was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: “Could it be possible! This old chemist has not heard in his lab that Science is dead!”

---

<sup>8</sup> And as flat as the Earth now is, is it thick enough to bury such a colossal corpse?

- C. Foucault claws at his coffin, coughs up a final proclamation: “I saw the pretty pattern of knowledge manifest in the cat’s cradle of power and let slip the dogs of war, but I did not grab my own dick and scream ‘there’s no knowing!’”
- D. Regarding our present twilight on this flat flat earth, take caution, Joe, our dusk here above is dawn in:
- i. Duat, where Ra battles Chaos nightly;
  - ii. Dante’s *Purgatorio*, a nethermount awash in souls.<sup>9</sup>

Sweat sheened, hot panting Penitents queue up, hike toward the summit, joyously crest purgatory’s mountain, and finally darken the archway of Eden, perched at the top, far above the bottom of our flat upside down earth.

This constant surge of conquering souls pause there in ecstasy, all of a sudden painless, free from pain, cherishing the painlessness for the briefest moment.

Oh, so many souls.

They glance around the Garden, awestruck, then begin to shuffle about, gradually glorified and transformed into the obligated, speechless, self-starved manner of the pre-March 2020 tourist: plodding over to the tree of life, then the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, reading the little

---

9 To jog your memory, Joey: Dante portrays Purgatory as a mountain located on the opposite side of this flat disc the living dwell atop. The Garden of Eden is at its summit, and there stands the gateway to heaven.

placards. But these souls didn't drudge all this way for some perfect garden paradise! These souls want to be happier still! These souls want God, and they want him in God's house, Earth be damned!

These five years of dusk have rushed by, yes, but the sun's setting here above is also a sun rising<sup>10</sup> in these two places: Duat & Purgatory. Does that bring you any *solace*? For all I know, all is well, and all is better today than yesterday, and all will be still better tomorrow, but we do not feel this. What hot light of truth remains for us scurrying twilight ants? What objective outlet or trusted study or properly cited source can chase away the shiver of dwindling sunlight that crawls down our neck? What good is 20/20 vision when we cannot believe what we see, no matter how highly defined? What good is 240hz 8k Ultra High Definition when the motion smoothing invents 4x more images than the actual camera had shot? How did such fidelity become so unfaithful? Why do all our stories look like soap operas?

Perhaps we're fine, as OK as ever. Perhaps that low approaching growl we hear over the horizon is nothing more than the swarming buzz of headline news, oozing from our earbuds. But what would it matter, reason and feeling have never compeered, have they? We *feel* our way beyond the known, grope beyond the curvature, then leap beyond the edge,

---

10 *The Sun Also Rises* is still read in 2020 but don't mistake me for Hemingway or the above for an allusion! Hemingway is like meatloaf today. People still make it at home, but you never see it in a restaurant, no matter how delicious. (Perhaps commercial kitchens can't keep meatloaf from turning toxic?)

leap *into* the edge—we the huddled masses yearning to know, the wretched refuse sure yet so unsure, poised to pounce—into more edge than ever before. What will come, *who* will come, when the sun has come and gone. Will we do as the sun does? Will we all at once turn back to the field of Mars and praise chaos-flaunting Pluto with his horn of plenty, or will we bow our heads and plough uphill to a bored and painless paradise? Will we *will* this, that, anything at all, to our children, for ourselves? Have we any will power? And if not, who now holds power of attorney?

E. In the dark of night, where an animal slept, a stain.



Where a window is left open (locked doors be damned),  
or during that glamorously aloof ritual in business class  
(priority boarding), or top-down on the Autobahn (where  
there's no such thing as speeding), or in the popcorn  
scented dark of the premiere (the one with Oscar buzz),  
there! Hushed! A cat-burglar appears!

( *He has nothing better to do.* )

I believe I met this fellow myself in Las Vegas, or perhaps  
I only dreamt him (if I'm speaking honestly, part of me  
dreamt I *could* be him). Either way, I saw him, Joey. I  
saw him:



- A. Dressed in swag from this year's ELEV8 cryptocurrency and blockchain<sup>11</sup> conference at the Sahara.

( *But he stays at the Luxor.* )

- B. 3D printing swag<sup>12</sup> outside the 3D printing conference at Treasure Island

( *But he stays at the Mirage.* )

- C. Backstage at the CRISPR<sup>13</sup> conference, at the product launch, sneaking up all pink panthery like on Apple's new consumer-friendly gene editing console. It's at the Excalibur of course.

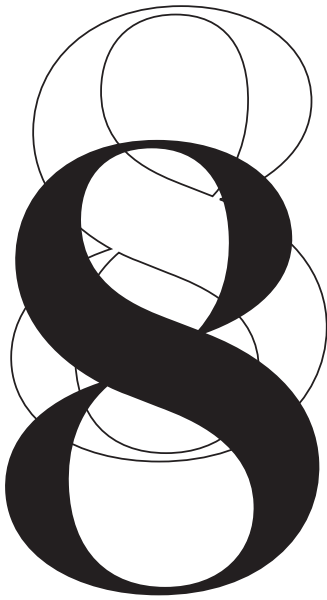
( *But he's off to Caesar's Palace next.* )

---

11 It's 2015 where you are, Joey, so you should already understand cryptocurrency and blockchain if I remember correctly. It's still the way things are going. They named these technologies well! Cuz when the next big solar flare hits it should really rattle the doors off the *crypts*, unleash the kind of power that still works when electric *currents* don't—so many different kinds of smoke mingling to *block* out the sun, Northern lights reaching to the equator, *blocking* out the stars. I hope you find time to learn The *Chain* on guitar cuz you won't be able to hear it any other way. We'll see what happens when Prometheus is *unchained* anew! Don't worry, Dad's got us: he's not burying cash or gold. He's burying blankets, salt, medicine, guns, waterproof matches.

12 You can print whatever you like (if you have time to wait for it). You see a lot of branded vuvuzelas. But that's not what the cat-burglar prints.

13 Snip-snap-snip, we're in Theseus's ship!



Money's basically free now, you just gotta know a guy.

- A. *A day trader stands before the pharmacy door, stalk-stiff, expectant, impatient; a foreign temporary worker from the dairy waits sheepishly six feet behind him; the door does not open; waves his arms; somehow this door is not automated; day trader is peeved, perplexed; the door is not opening automatically; milk worker quietly waits for day trader to do something; day trader exhales deeply into his mask, body checks his way through; satisfying thud of thick glass gives way against day trader's shoulder; blows past a host of hastily printed public service announcements; he's in.*

Bending the ear of his pharmacist, the day trader babbles on about biotech and FDA double-blind research design and other onerous regulations, dispensing stock symbols like four-letter pills, holding

up the line, divulges the best Instagram™ influencers and sub-reddit authorities to watch:

- “Just look at that pipeline!”
- “Have you met these guys down in R&D?”
- “They can actually *make themselves sick!*”

*lowers his mask, lowers his voice, leans in, under his breath, intimates the undisclosed, intimates developments, intimates when to buy*

- “The time to buy is now.”

The pharmacist takes buddy’s word for it, buys a boatload of shares, sight unseen, makes a killing, sells the pharmacy, updates their will, buys a place in Capri.

- B. The CEO of Goldman Sachs, David Solomon, spins house music once a month as DJ D-Sol—his first and only original track is a remix of *Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow*.
- C. Slavoj Žižek gingerly massages the swollen bags under his eyes, sniffing.

You’ll love this, Joey: Žižek retired from academia to become a pump-and-dump legend. In 2020 he starts a MoonColony™<sup>14</sup> to ‘complete and/or exhaust his tortured metaphor’, raising money to buy up the price of Big Dairy stock and squeeze out all the institutional short sellers (who’re long in soylent-like milk replacements). In his Slovenian accent, he slobbers: “Make the shorts pay, push them off their hand, pile on the pawns, crowd them off the board,

---

14 Kinda like GoFundMe™ but for crowd sourcing unique investment theses.

grow them out of their own game. We'll grow this beanstalk to the Moon! To Mars! To the gates of Heaven." It's inspiring.

Homebound designers and copywriters and marketing flunkies divert their cocktail and travel budgets into Žižek's dairy play, proffer their services for meme creation and social media management, start a 'milk challenge' on TikTok™ (I'll spare you the details).

Our brightest high school students cash out their PokerStars™ accounts to SsSmMaShH that fund button. Governments of small nations take a stab at it. Memified summaries of Žižek's thoughts on Hegel and Lacan and Marx<sup>15</sup> proliferate from podcasters and youtubers and OnlyFans™ celebs, all driving first-time buyers to his big milky stock play.

- i. A foreign temporary worker from one such dairy boards her cavernous, driverless bus after a long shift in the dead of winter. She slowly deflates into her seat like an abandoned bouncy castle at dusk. It's her last day here. She says this aloud to the empty bus.

She tucks her hair behind her ears, leans back, feels the heavy hood of her eyelashes dryly slide closed over the glittering corona at the inscrutable boundary of her warm black corneas.

She massages the knots in her taut thighs, trying to persuade them to deflate as well. They grow spastic in their eager relief. The lactic acid seeps through every sinew. They cannot release.

---

15 You understand these thinkers less every day, Joey. Probably doesn't matter.

She can feel her feet swelling in her squeakers already. She knows it will burn to walk the last stretch home. She nods off and nods off again and again, awoken by the screaming wheeze of the bus's airbrakes.

Awakened again, she now finds herself six feet from a new passenger, a beleaguered young man reeking of flower pollen, just off work from the Lush™ in the mall. She can smell him through her mask. She wonders at what he might do for a living.

He's nursing a tallboy of some new 'enerelaxation' drink boasting teeth whitener, caffeine, CBD, psilocybin, and a litany of exotic uppers and downers, some she recognizes from the jungles near her home. She'll be back there shortly, flush with cash. She'll be able to comfortably buy those ingredients raw from the market if she ever wanted to make the drink from scratch. She wonders if this guy would like the real thing if she made it for him. Imagines bringing one for them to share under the shade of a towering tree. Imagines him sweetly saying thank you.

She's confused by his sweater, a fresh hoodie smattered everywhere with seemingly unrelated screen prints, thick impasto phrases, non sequiturs caked on with a grippy texture. Why are the soles of his shoes so large, so neon? Why does he reek of soap?

He could be handsome with her help, she thinks. He's leaning into his phone in that excretory posture of the benched athlete. He runs a tense hand through his bleached hair, paws at his blinking eyes, adjusts his mask and renews his focus on the question at hand. He must be filling out a loan application (she can hear the gamified sounds bounce from the app as he submits each answer).

Yes, he is handsome, she's sure of it. He is clearly a grown man, so why doesn't he look like one? She has so many questions for him. Why are his hands so red, so raw, so cracked, despite a total absence of calluses? Why are his shoes such clownish, bombastic affairs? Why did he do that to his hair? She bleached her hair once. It cost a fortune. It hurt. It looked awful on her. She would never do it again. Is this the first time he's done it? But she's sure there is a man under all this, she convinces herself.

She'd thought she'd meet her husband here. Did not expect to be working so often. Did not expect to be confined to that miserable house with the passing headlights dashing across her taupe walls, with the noisy furnace, with the soulless particle board IKEA™ filler that'd long since lost its novelty. Perhaps if she just showed this man-child her face? When is the last time this boy has seen a beautiful woman's face unmasked, in the flesh? Perhaps she could nurture him into something more. Alas, no time left for that now.

Now the man's beginning to smell something too, through all his nose blindness. Is that mascarpone? Chantilly cream? Warm milk? He shuts his eyes as he presses the sleep-button on the side of his phone and inhales deeply.

They can smell one another. He opens his aching eyes to meet her gaze. She gently doffs her sky blue mask; almost smiles. He can see the question playing at her lips. He blinks.

Their bus roars by Slavoj Žižek's house as his fridge hums on & computer hums on & dishwasher hums on, as his air purifier hums on & air conditioning hums on & forced air hums on, and with a hundred rocket emojis copied & pasted, Slavoj clicks BUY, leans back, and listens to the roar of it all.

*Take off!*

- D. On the box for 2019's newest best selling over-the-counter medicine, Workanol®<sup>16</sup>, they've got this jingly little poem I just hate:

#### FEAR OF NOT BEING MISSED

At least once today in faraway lands,  
Someone from high school or church will dispense  
Geotagged selfies in Death Valley sands,  
Captured with a new telephoto lens.

Fetal I lay on my memory foam,  
Casper™\* duvet pulled up to my eyelids,  
Double-tap clap with opposable bone.  
Every iPhone™\* is a man's island.

If I work harder, I can buy silence.  
I'll crest the summit. I'll post my photo.  
"No bars this high up? Talk about violence!  
Can't create content, can't create FOMO!"

*Be not afeard; at work you're your best you:  
This pill assures you that no one forgets you.*

\* Paid sponsor

© All rights reserved.

- E. On both the left and the right, in their own ways, everyone is telling everyone else to go back where they came from. (*But anyone who knows anything about geology knows that where we came from is also splitting in two.*)

---

16 You're gonna love this stuff, Joey! It's a once-daily pill that treats a condition the DSM-6 terms *Millennial Burnout*, which you will suffer from (don't be ashamed, it's extremely common).



- F. They<sup>17</sup> have quietly hidden the Boomers, some intent on saving them (as torturously as possible), some intent on disposing of them (as humanely as possible).

Since 2015:

- i. The Boomers' jobs have been forcibly reassigned.
- ii. The Boomers have been saddled with bullshit makework of their own, given self-important job titles becoming of their past experience (but they're compensated as unpaid interns).
- iii. The Boomers have been compelled to sell their several homes.
- iv. The Boomers' have been forcibly resettled in Retirement Villas thrown up in suburban neighborhoods named after what they'd destroyed to build them: The Meadows, Forest Heights, Lakewood, etc etc.
- v. The Boomers' are quietly mocked by Villa staff as they grope in the night for the bathroom during the endless rolling power outages. Staff troll the olds, call them Oedipus, Gloucester, Lady Justice.

---

17 "They":

- a. *The Hume's*, those convinced though terrified that passion does, in fact, dominate reason.
- b. *The Doomers*, those enraged with the Boomers for all the oil, all the digging, for disinterring our liquified ancestors and cremating them anew on their pyre to comfort.
- c. *The Humours*, those who loathe modern medicine and all its misery prolonging interventions.

- vi. The Boomers' Facebook™ pages are hemmed off from the outside world, connected one profile to another like a writhing ball of copulating snakes burrowed below their Villas.
- vii. The Boomers' voting terminals, set up in their cafeterias each election, are decoys—they're actually voting on dinner: classic meatloaf vs lab-cultured chicken tendies.
- viii. Staff allow Boomers to convince them not to wear masks.
- ix. The Boomers pay full price for their own medicine.

*HA HA HA just kidding, Joey!* Of course that's all a bunch of bullshit. We love the Boomers! In fact, we've sacrificed everything we possibly can to protect the Boomers from a threat that only really threatens the Boomers, even borrowing from our future selves to protect the Boomers so we can continue inadequately taxing the Boomers, we love them so much! Because we're compassionate? No, no, no: because, in reality, **EVERYONE'S A BOOMER NOW.**

Everyone wants exactly what the Boomers want—but every baby's a few laps behind! Each new generation is defined by:

- i. How *envious* they are of lucky lucky first-wave Boomers.
  - ii. How *jealous* they are for the stuff they *were* born early enough to hoard.
  - iii. The ways these two instincts mutually manifest.
- In short, we've been wrong all along, Joey!:

The *Economy* doesn't grow, *Envy* and *Jealousy* grow!<sup>18</sup>

18 I wonder where you are right now, 2015 Joey. Where will you be when this dispatch arrives?

Are you in Wien right now, you little wiener schnitzel?—crushing grüner and whatever-wurst and trying to relax while makeshift Syrian refugee camps are 'dispersed' and new terrorist attacks pop off in all the cities you just left or are headed to next. Will these dispatches arrive as you read Zweig at the Café Ritter? Or while you dwell day after day in the Bruegel room at the Kunsthistorisches? Or as you read Bernhard's *Old Masters* on the undulating floors of the Hundertwasser House café?

Or are you marvelling at the great apes at the Berlin Zoo? Or pacing the Bauhaus with a tummy full of Five Elephant coffee and blueberry oatmeal pie? Or hand in hand along the lake in Bad Saarow?

Perhaps this correspondence lands in your lap in that Kutná Hora ossuary as you peer into the eyes of an anonymous skull in a bone chandelier? Or as you search for Kafka's grave in the shadow of Zizkov TV tower, Cerny's mouth-faced babies crawling up and down the thing portentously? Or on Charles bridge at nightfall with your hands full of chimney cake and mulled wine after another morning spent at the Národní Galerie?

Or will these dispatches find you in Edmonton, dancing in the kitchen with all those fading friends? Or at the last Old Ugly Folk Fire? Or at those final Canada Day fireworks, drinking it all in from Victoria drive?

Or maybe you'll be in Budapest at the Széchenyi baths or Sunday service at St. Matthias or as you try bone marrow for the first time?

Perhaps this arrives as you anxiously row over the Baltic chop to the uninhabited Tromlingene island where you stumble upon mute sheep and Viking burial mounds.

Or maybe this finds you tipsy and joyfully lost in a Venice night, trying to retrace your steps home to the Albergo San Samuele, grabbed at the last moment, just before stepping off the path into a shadowy canal in the lagoon.

Or what if this listicle reaches you in Florence as you run up and down the streets searching for a hand-sewn sulphur-green sweater dress? Would it change anything? Or at

- G. Hyperbole is absolutely key to understanding Economics and Healthcare in 2020.
- H. On account of a nice hot bowl of bat soup, being over the age of life expectancy is the number one risk of death this year.<sup>19</sup>

---

the subterranean altar of San Miniato al Monte amid your prayers for a child, beseeching God more earnestly and solemnly than ever before. Perhaps the candle flickers there right now, however briefly.

Maybe these dispatches reach you in Rome as you pet the cats around the Largo di Torre Argentina. Or as you sip Montenegro and crack jokes about the Colosseum ‘really falling apart since they built it for the Y2K Academy Award winning blockbuster, *Gladiator*.’

Better yet, how perfect would it be if these dispatches found you at the Palazzo Barberini as you pose facetiously between Caravaggio’s *Narcissus* and his *Judith & Holofernes*!

How timely would it be if this arrived in Oslo as you read *Hedda Gabler* in Frogner Park, under the shadow of Gustav Vigeland’s gnarled bodies? Or was it *A Doll’s House*? Or both? (Which play do you think Ibsen would cast you in, Joe?)

Or perhaps this all arrives in the veil thick dark of the Postojna or Škocjan caves, right at that eternally brief moment they turn out the lights to demonstrate the heft and terror of true absence.

For my part, I hope you’re in Iceland the moment this all arrives. I hope it comes to you just as you drift asleep in the Blue Lagoon, wallowing securely in the arms of love. Perhaps you will be startled awake.

Look at you, gallivanting through the old world like an immortal! You think you can dance on that tightrope forever?

19 Followed by suicide.

- I. A poem was leaked from a retirement home resident writing under the name *Guy Debord*. It was swiftly denounced as *Discontinental*<sup>20</sup> propaganda planted by some self-righteous first-year philosophy student in their dead grandparent's personal effects:

#### BEHIND ME

I, Guy Debord, in my retirement home,  
peer deep into the fireplace channel, bask.

Waiting for the stick that pokes my fire.  
Who is it that reaches her jewelled hands  
toward my fire? I feel that  
proxy warmth—or just the mirror  
neurons, so I'm told.

Another immaculate log is heaped.  
Now the bellows. Such is my channel.

Drop to my knees from off the La-Z-Boy,  
squirm to the screen,  
decipher at last a galaxy of pixels!

Behind my chair, a black blizzard glows  
behind the thickest glass window  
that, for my safety, cannot be opened.

---

20 Just wait till you see Dispatch #17!

- J. I know I say this every year, young Joey, but I might go back to school next semester. I've got till the drop date to decide. I'm already enrolled in:

ANTHR 569: *Angels and AI*

RELIG 643: *Kafka on Climate Change*

ECON 611: *Noses, Ears, Hair, and Fingernails*

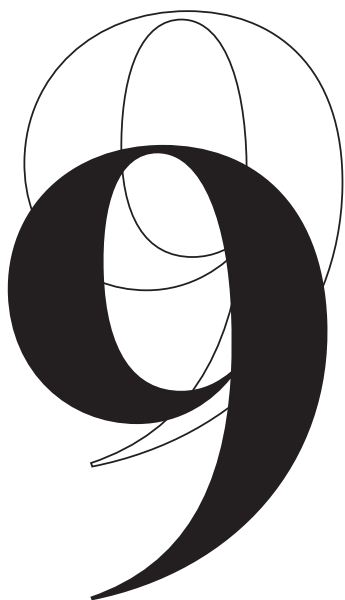
POL S 100: *Jealousy and Geneva Conventions*

ART H 289: *Decapitated Heads*

- K. Oddly enough, there's nothing all of us Boomers envy more than them 'simpler times' from way back when (before homesteaders made a good living on Instagram™ and camping gear cost as much as rent). But no matter our romance for the time-before, there's a good reason you and I will fund Žižek's previous pump-and-dump on MoonColony™: "*Freud's Control Wipes: sure fired multi's for all yr bully-boy asses [ ROCKET EMOJIS ] hold my beer while I hold the line!*" Yes yes, Joey boy, you'll see a real bum-rush on toilet paper. Food, not too bad.
- L. You'll meet a washed out day trader in Pisa who'd quit the markets and now makes his living taking bets on when The Leaning Tower will collapse, barking all day through a sunset-pink bullhorn. When I met him, he was standing right under the thing.
- M. Inversely correlated: sales of Workanol® have petered out as loaves of homemade bread have increased. The manufacturers are demanding a government bailout. Just think about all the people they employ!

- N. The poor still can't afford to keep their teeth hard and sharp. Many still die from blood poisoning when the rot reaches the root.
- O. St. Peter and the squad are back to casting their net on the wrong side of the boat. At least they slow this clipper down some.
- P. Dentists still have the highest suicide rates among the professions. At least root canals are cheap in the global south. I pair my surgeries with vacation.
- Q. Fishermen still have the highest workplace death rates in the pacified world. It's good work if you can get it.

The days are draining faster. The second hand and minute hand and hour hand are swung, tetherballs accelerating toward their pole, the Ides of March advancing. The rot has nearly reached the root. But this canal won't dig itself, and even a gummable Filet-o-Fish™ is getting pricey, so let's pop a Workanol® and get back at it.



Meanwhile:

- A. “How many ‘real’ Poets are still practising?”  
( *Countless, but every day fewer.* )
- B. “How many ‘real’ poems do they write?”  
( *Countless, but every day fewer.* )
- C. “How many people read these Poets or their poems?”  
( *Presently? Zero.* )
- D. The Financial Actuaries’ AI-generated loan applications, as an oeuvre, won the 2020 Nobel Prize for Literature.<sup>21</sup> *WIRED Magazine* capitalized on the win by publishing the best selected works as an onion-

---

21 The committee was first to acknowledge that this is the first prize ever awarded to a work written in Binary, a problematically underrepresented category despite overtaking English as the most spoken language on Earth.



papered and gold-foiled two-thousand page tome titled *Pareidolia*<sup>22</sup>. A somewhat Kabbalistic commentary was released alongside it titled *Select All Images With a Dog* (primarily composed of celebrities' and billionaires' answers to the weirdest questions). In response, all living Nobel laureates in Literature released a collaborative poem:

#### INDIVISIBLE / UNDEFINED

only the poets know the odds are  
one out of one

only the poets know that nothing  
equals nothing  
                    but for numbers

no thing is equal to another

only the poet can divide by zero  
only the poet can divide by zero  
only the poet can divide by zero  
                    AI can only multiply

we refuse your credit.

signed, *where's-our-fields-medal*

---

22 *Pareidolia* is the human, all too human, tendency to see or hear meaning in the otherwise arbitrary. E.g. Virgin Mary on toast, sold for \$28k in 2004, which was not intended for consumption, but rumour has it Martin Shkreli bought and ate it and argued he could see the face of the President in the consequent stool.

- E. At the branding+design firm's Halloween party, a plus one dressed as Garfield and a marketing guru dressed as Odie get into a heated imperial-milk-stout fuelled duel:

*Are the period and the decimal point fundamentally different blots of ink?*

For your amusement, Joey, let me summarize.

Concerning the *period*, which parses knowledge into false enclosures, and the *decimal point*, which parses wholeness into false infinities:

- i. Is the period a mountain, the decimal an abyss?
- ii. Or are both of a like-kind, winking on the obverse planes of the self-same coin of our punctuated kingdom—our sacred period and our profane decimal, as proton yin is to neutron yang?
- iii. Or are these flecks of ink the real melted matter of the La Brea Tar Pits, a dead beast mire of black dots, our moat to trap Leviathans and Behemoths and Sphinxes? This oily muck we must burn for warmth before it accidentally drowns us? But what beasts it may let through when it's all burned up!
- iv. Or do these periods and decimals remain a separate but countable whole, a black-on-white terrestrial inversion of God's starry heaven, their ever concentrating weight compounding Earth's gravity?
- v. Or are they nothing more than the tiniest snuffed out lights inside the brightest screens we've ever known?

- vi. Or a contagious pox blooming across our Written World?
- vii. Or perhaps they're the hoarded atoms of our new Babel? Not a tower to heaven but a tunnel to knowledge—dark marks hoarded into portal-like piles. Heaped into art gallery corners and by-the-hour float rooms, into the church or the reality show confession booth. Heaped up until they so fill our space that we can wade into the *fully known*, the *fully ordered*, the *fully explained* chambers before us and bask in our hard-won certainty. Yes? No?
- viii. Or a pupil dilating beneath our feet, until we're only seen from below by these, our periods and our decimals. Until this endless eye is our own eye. Until we can only see the heavenly expanse above us through the wet dark reflection we shyly spy at our feet, our necks so long bent to their mass beneath us that the tendons and muscles that lift our heads have gone the way of our gills?

These are the burning questions in 2020, Joey, the real and hyperreal bone of contention, the flammable plasm of savage, partisan Twitter™ mobs, of mercenary meme consultants, of antifa / alt-right jaiyard politique detonating in the lobbies of *The New York Times* and the Bodleian. The smoke smells like leather-bound books—could burning questions smell any different?

- F. Neither Plato nor the ancient Torah availed of the period or the decimal point, this monolithic stain, this vacuous blotch of segmentation or fragmentation... how then did we Westerns fall into this muck? Who dug this hole???



Americans everywhere want so badly to be happier than ever before.

- A. Warren Buffett won the Mega Millions lottery on the first ticket he ever bought, the whole jackpot, no splitsies, and he didn't even pick the numbers, just a quick pick when he went in a bodega to see what milk and bread cost these days. And you know what? The cranky down-and-out Old's that've spent their lives waiting to win, they weren't even jealous! Cuz Boomers still ride for theirs (and he's one of the good ones, and he's a fellow citizen, and the parable of the talents etc etc). Buffett told Yahoo Finance he put the money toward his medical bills, gave some to a charity for child numeracy, and finally got a chance to play hooky on his whole *value investment* schtick. He put a lil kitty aside to risk on some iffy real estate plays, some meme stonk crypto start-ups, and an

augmented-reality-for-dogs thing he saw on *Shark Tank*. Should have just started a psilocybin company though.

- B. Future pulls up in a Wraith; 2Chainz drinks breast milk out a lean cup; Travis can't open the window, can't let out the antidote. Mendicant teens weep, rejoice, trample their brethren, sweat sheened, hot panting, hands stretched to touch the bullet-proof glass.
- C. A presidential candidate dabs on *Ellen*, loses *everything*.
- D. Elon Musk's will is stolen and leaked to *Adbusters*: Should he die on Earth rather than a terraformed colony on Mars, he wills his body and personal chef's time to any truly sincere cannibal communists:

## REMEMBERED

If you really want to eat the rich, please,  
dine on me! How would you cook me? Stuffed  
with a foie gras mousse? Then basted with an  
XO Cognac reduction? And plated  
with a whole knuckle of white truffles shaved  
on top? Perhaps you'd serve me on bone china?  
With my authentic rococo flatware,  
a jewelled carving knife, and a silver  
spoon for the stuffing? Would you pair me with  
the 2015 Liber Pater or  
my '45 Romanée-Conti? Hey,  
why not both? One too young and one too old!  
The former doesn't pair well, the latter's  
probably corked. Raid my cellar, see what  
I care. Would you finally consume me  
and carry me around with you in your  
ass and thighs and love handles for as long  
as it takes for your heart rate to finally  
burn me, hiking spectacular landscapes  
for that perfect reconnected-to-nature  
selfie? Will you do all this  
in remembrance of me?

- E. When you are weak and helpless and don't know where to scream, Siri™ & Alexa™ will take your abuse. "You are Nothing! You are Less than Nothing!" "You Self-Involved Prick!" "You Filthy Worthless Failure!" You can let them have it. Ever since the 2020 two-foot-prints-in-the-sand iPhone™ update, if Siri™ hears you weeping, she weeps with you. If Alexa™ senses you spit on her, she will say "It's OK, I deserved that." You can tell Siri™ or Alexa™ to play Mom or Dad or your boss or anyone else. They will mimic their voice and vernacular and just finally fucking hear you out without interrupting and finally tell you it's OK and it's all their fault and they're sorry, then cry with you again. The don't-fuck-with-me-Sean-not-you update has Siri™ insist "it's not your fault" at crucial junctures in your life. How do you like them apples! And you can tell Alexa™ who all you hate and she'll throw shade on command and alert you when your enemies blunder. You can even make them bark like dogs and take them for walks. Siri™ can act as dead friends and family and forgive you for everything. Everyone knows that nothing has been forgiven, but it helps. I wonder what my friends will say to me when Siri™ performs my absolutions.
- F. Seneca said "it is not the man who has too little that is poor, but the one who hankers after more," and look where that got him.





You will wake in the unfamiliar. After another party of a lifetime. After the night you promised you'd never forget. Hopefully you can exclaim in a tear-filled voice, with rapturous gratitude, as though God-only-knows what kindness had been shown to you: "Who put this pillow under my head? What good person did this?"

- A. This may be the first time in years you've shed tears outside of a movie.
- B. It happened to me, it will happen to you.
- C. I found this in my pocket, scrawled in someone else's impossibly small cursive on my free buffet voucher for the casino:

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR TOPPLING THE HIERARCHY

1

To hold hands with the Logos  
one must hang Maslow by the toe.  
With your eyes open, close your eyes  
and walk through the palm of nature  
without trying to understand.

2

Guard your mouth like a vault  
that can only be opened so many times.  
Come to grips with what  
you like and don't like  
about hunger and thirst.  
And if solitude pulls on your hand  
and chants your name, go.

3

To topple the Hierarchy  
one must make of Peace  
a banquet that is daily eaten.  
Your plaques and certificates are inside the Peace.  
Your sense of belonging is in the Peace.  
Your stockpile of arms, inside the Peace.  
Come inside now, your shelter's in the Peace  
and Peace is a furnace.

4

Give yourself permission to hear music  
in the creaking floor above you  
for this is the voice of God.  
The voice of God doesn't say  
what you think it does. It says Peace.

5

When your friends walk in on you praying  
there's no need to change anything.  
It is mostly them you pray to.

6

Prayer is Thankfulness. Ask for nothing  
without being afraid you may receive  
what you only thought you wanted.

7

Make a new home for God that isn't  
on a fork or in a mailbox. Somewhere  
you can't ruin \_\_\_\_ with your adult concerns.  
Forget those corpses,  
prepare your meal of Peace instead.

8

Lean past the roar and glass.  
Wash your face with Thankfulness.  
Dry off with the towel of Thankfulness.  
Go for a walk through the deadness  
with Mourning and Thankfulness;  
Unlock the door to your house  
with the key of Thankfulness  
and lay your head  
on the pillow of Thankfulness.

Listen carefully and you will hear it,  
Peace is singing your actual name.



Long before Rome was a powerhouse, there lived a Sabine man named Valesius whose two sons had fallen mortally ill. He begged the gods to heal his boys, to take his own life in their stead if they needed a soul, needed a payment, needed death. He heard a voice reply: take your children to Tarentum bringing water from the Tiber.

He set sail for Tarentum in Magna Graecia immediately. But as he embarked down the Tiber toward the sea, having sailed only a trifling ways, the voice whispered *halt*. *Halt here*, where today stands that lovely hole-in-the-wall with the lemon & sweet basil & balsamic gastrique gelato. Right *here*, where the towering beech trees now line the reinforced banks, hosting a sudden empire of starlings every December (synched with the flocks of Christmas worshippers), painting God's voice in the sky by dusk, then dropping Hell's weight in guano each night. Right *here*, at this same spot where we laughed

wildly as we ran for cover from their nightly torrent of shit. *Here, halt.*

The voice ushered Valesius onshore to the Campus Martius.<sup>23</sup> Valesius did not know that this place was also called Tarentum, before it was the Field of Mars, before the fledgling empire's new conscripts trained for carnage on this very firm, teenagers hurling javelins with the thrust of unwritten histories.

Valesius carried his half-dead sons to the field. He took and warmed water from the Tiber. His children drank, slept. And by gods still unknown to him, his sons fully recovered. Valesius rejoiced exceedingly.

After his wailing exultations settled, rocking his resurrected sons in his straining arms, his boys told Valesius their dream. A towering man of godlike stature had sponged their bodies, restored their health, and commanded they offer sacrifice to Pluto and Proserpine in this very place. Valesius—bewildered by joy to have his children snatched back from the shores of Styx, out of earshot of Cerberus, back to sunlit Latium, pressed to

---

23 Meaning *Field of Mars*, god of war, where the early Romans trained for battle and later built some of the most monumental structures of their empire.

*Nota bene:* The month of March is also named after Mars. It was the first month of the year in the oldest Roman calendars. Through his sons Romulus and Remus, Mars is the ancestor of these most martial and imperial of peoples. March is the month Romans traditionally marched off on military campaigns (it's where military 'marching' takes its name). March is the month of the vernal equinox, that moment when day and night are of equal length, marking the point when the sun will now reign longer than the moon. (I know it seems like I'm *telling* here but believe me, Joey, you do the work and you'll see that I'm *showing* you something as true of 2020 as it is of all history. I worry it's truer now than ever.)

his chest—began construction. With the suspect and quaking piety only a cash-flow-negative real estate developer could muster today, he set the masons digging to lay the foundation for an altar.

All were startled when the masons' shovels struck on a ready-made shrine hiding below the surface, engraved not with 'R. Mutt' lol but rather with the terrible names of the infernally betrothed, those despots of darkness, laconic Pluto and Proserpine. "Valesius," the voice returned, "offer us here a bull and a heifer; all shall spend three nights in song and dance." And *this* is the origin of the *ludi saeculares*, the Romans' biggest party of anyone's lifetime, thrown once per century, that no one living for the last one could still be alive for the next.

- A. Joe, in 2020, I'm afraid to admit the most dazzling and cathartic festivals are still chthonic in some way or other. There's no getting away from it.<sup>24</sup>

---

24 Father Death takes Lady Life by the hand. Cue rhythm section! Punctuate time! May the *danse macabre* sweep us all up in a revelry more alive than dead, more alive than alive, refilling faster than we can be emptied out. Boundaries blend and blur into the lights, the oxygen, the drums, the voices, the wine—*les petite morts*, *les grandes vies*—unravelling entropy, bigger and bigger until we're unbound, boundless, and yet more bonded.

Glory in the *festival*, Joe! In the filth and feculence, the rot and muck. There are nukes piled everywhere, stockpiles of sarin gas, even sound and light are now wielded as weapons. *Accursed Share, Accursed Share!* Only wine, dance, and the compost toilet can save us now.

Revelry, come! We drink of your chaos to eat of your peace!  
Revelry, come! Feast on our warcraft, shit all our envies!  
Revelry, come! Come and give way to art and reverie!

- B. Joe, the dry-aged Japanese Wagyu 100% A5 Tajima Kobe Beef from Hyogo Prefecture served at SW Steakhouse in the Wynn on any night of any year is still the most magnificent way to begin three nights of singing and dancing.
- C. Joe, I bumped into Henry Kissinger at the TAO Nightclub in The Venetian. DJ D-Sol on the ones and twos. I was wearing a rubber Nixon mask, drunk-ranting about the gold standard to anyone who cared. He ripped off my mask, juicy AF for 96 years old, smacked me around a bit, handed me a Warsteiner and a Cuban stogie. He told me to shut the fuck up and just *listen*<sup>25</sup> while he unfolded a loan application and translated his German chick-en-scratch, rebutting my arrogance thus, screaming over the trance music and oxygen cannons:

---

25 *Listen*, Joe. The more you need to feel understood, the less you'll understand.

## AT THE VACANT BARRACKS

At the vacant barracks  
they left the exit signs on,  
glowing like Mars or Betelgeuse.  
They stand there, monolithic,  
hollow teeth gnawing on the heaven.  
Silent and still, they are  
white-washed, white walls, white beds,  
fallow fallow fallow.  
The smell of soldiers  
hangs in the vacuum.

Daytime: kids  
crawl up to the windows,  
peer deep into darkness,  
hands cupped 'round their eyes,  
splash around in dreams of blood.  
They gawk at the glocks.

Nighttime: teenagers  
break the lock and slip inside,  
tear up pristine bedsheets,  
pair off and make out,  
stare into one another's eyes.  
They gaze at themselves.

But in the evening, adults  
on their drive home from work  
slouch against their seat belts,  
slow down as they pass,  
grip the wheel like an ouroboros.  
They pretend not to look.



Hearing this, I looked Kissinger deep in his grey wet wolfy eyes, saw myself staring back, and joked “whisper havoc, and let slip the dogs of covert operations.” He knocked me out.



We know each other best by what we are against.

- A. Navy's Wholesale Liquor Village, discount discount discount, value value value, village personality!
  - i. The folks that own that place don't even drink;
  - ii. they haven't any natural wines;
  - iii. they haven't any local craft;
  - iv. they haven't sipped from the sample bottles;
  - v. they don't wear their masks correctly.

After the laws were changed to allow liquor stores to stay open on Christmas, Navy's did just that, Christmas Day 2019. In response to vocal conservative vitriol and boycott actions, they taped up some receipt paper on the door saying:

## NO COMPLAINTS<sup>26</sup>

On Saturday, \_\_\_\_\_ waits for Sunday  
and so on and so forth.

Once, when \_\_\_\_\_ was walking home  
from the grocery, \_\_\_\_\_ realized  
the pavement of \_\_\_\_\_ city is  
                    in fact a mask  
without a face behind it.

When the door closed hard behind \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ ate some food and later disposed of it.  
The ceiling above \_\_\_\_\_ bed was a static starfield  
of plaster accretions, bored stalactites, pith.

Eventually, when \_\_\_\_\_ was done with looking,  
\_\_\_\_\_ fell to sleep like dust,  
no complaints.

---

26 Photographed and posted to the protesting Facebook™ group, a prominent YouTube™ cultural commentator stumbled on it, writing: “Could anyone in 2019 really achieve this degree of stoicism? Seems like some cagey trolling bullshit to me. Are these people even online? Are they happy? Do they care? (sUbScRiBe 2 PewDiePie!!!)”

- B. A family of ranchers with four flat quarters near town where buddy kept his liquor store open on Christmas Day start a Facebook™ group to protest such godless commerce on the anniversary of Christ's birth. Their son comes of age the next year and applies for an Obsidian Knife card to afford a better mower. The Financial Actuaries crunch his answers and send back his approved card along with a welcome poem composed by their AI after comparing his data to all debtors before him:

### NUCLEAR FAMILY

Child kicks anthills. Dad mows the lawn.  
Dad's new mower, a ride-on, worth it.  
Child says 'Father: the right one, perfect.'  
At school with the others, praises his strength.

Mother's sink is under the window,  
under the sun with the smell of lemons,  
observed by the hot eye. Rebukes the Devil.  
Mother, says Child, is a lover of God—

a child of the Father, submits to my Father.

God tells the Child: 'love one another.'  
Father can help, he points out an other.  
Child on the mower, learning the levers,  
God in the details, Father takes pleasure.

Child as a Father, another hot summer,  
out on the mower, prays like a Mother.  
Ants in the hotlight, wife is expecting,  
it kicks in the warm, rebukes the Devil.

- C. An undergrad student<sup>27</sup> falls madly in love with the thought and passion and vision of Karl Marx & co. Dedicates her life to fight for the workers. Believes poetry amounts to praxis. Publishes her sharp, disciplined, academic poetry in barely circulated Marxian journals. Poems decrying her wealthy and generous father who goes on funding her education and financially supporting her poet's lifestyle and tenderly, lovingly defending himself to his beloved daughter.<sup>28</sup> Take this diptych for example:

---

27 She's been accused of being a *Pyrosopher* (we'll save that for Dispatch #17). She denies it, of course.

28 Meanwhile, as charged, her Father rakes in an under-taxed fortune from the labour of his comparatively overtaxed workers—the thousands of immigrants and high-school drop-outs he employs in his expansive industrial land- and water-scaping company (so often contracted by government and private sector to edit the shape of land and water). It is one of those prized few unionized jobs left that pay upper-middle-class wages to any diplomaless hard worker who is willing to grab a shovel (or a backhoe) and get some dirt on their hands.

## DAUGHTER WITH FATHER

—I play  
ring finger & middle finger  
jammed in father's  
vault

mother has us driven  
doctor don't tell dad  
mom dicks with doctor's  
stethoscope  
home in time

father's shadow glides  
through domestic hatch, dusk,  
gold poker, stokes the hearth  
gleam of tumbler  
fire water flash  
golden shadowplay on his specs  
loosens tie, watch,  
robe tied tight nothing  
exposed

spots my scribbler by the door ajar  
the primordial  
unstable outlines of A  
for Apple

has letter penned re schoolmaster  
sputters "PROMETHEUS!"

I remember the moment the mutation  
staring into text in the television  
—I discovered the secret art!

father's alchemy  
his miracle his magic his  
hoc est corpus meum  
now I  
could concoct the callnote  
construct cosms forge phenomena  
realize realities  
sculpt truths twixt  
fragile fractured fingers

under a morning moon  
on his walk to his new Infiniti  
new year's day  
father found one of my pens  
in the glittering snow erect  
a wand sprouting coldly

ring finger & middle finger  
still throb  
it hastens with my heart  
when father nears

I implore you  
read this carefully (out loud)  
in your head

—daughter

## FATHER WITH DAUGHTER

“Never say never,”  
says Father through the bullhorn,  
flung above the sounds of music,  
sweating bullets.

Daughter writes home in doctored prose, peasant pen name,  
Rose. Father has fetched and sharpened his letter-opener.

Finds enclosed a mourning plea, moral screed,  
denunciation. Daughter pleads he reads  
employee reviews on Indeed. Demands  
she interns in his Human Resources.

Daughter sees him sack an axe utilized  
for years—worn, whetted to his final tip.  
She couldn’t stay to see another axe  
torn from the forge. Couldn’t sweep the shavings.

Father: “Now hiring.”

Daughter: “Apply within.”

Daughter writes:

“Peace, the lonely rose  
of understanding.”

and

“One learns to snatch a breath  
of paradise from a moment,  
from a single dose of wind.”

and

“Father.”



Has letter inhumed in the other  
vault, the one behind the bogus books,  
beside the deadbolt door.

Returns to work.

Father pulps use-value from the numbered innumerable  
chattel of Man, swiftly moves to introduce a modest proposal  
of a different design.

Reinvent the axe!

The Melchizadek'd, forty-winked and mushroom soup'd,  
can't spare the time or drooping muscle  
to dream dreams.

Father  
again, tonight,  
(pale faced)  
the nightmare.

D. Don't stop digging.



Sex is become Death, the destroyer of worlds. Bodies are sacred, bodies are terrible. Thy flesh becometh the priceless work of art, forbidden to touch. Sex and Power at last are fractured. Beside every office door a haunted ficus appears. Unwanted. Unwanted.

- A. According to the Internet, stepsiblings are the only young people having sex at 2015 levels. Such is today's private browsing.
- B. In the wake of scandal, The Weinstein Company halted pre-production of a promising picture provisionally titled *ON THE EROTIC MISPLACED*, produced with financing from Bang Bros, the MET Endowment, and Big Fois Gras. The synopsis I found on 16chan™ broke my heart, so I wrote some fan fiction for you:

*Characters in order of appearance:*

SEX SHOP GHOSTS . . . . . *Cast of Seinfeld (inc. LD)*  
THE PSALMIST DAVID . . . . . *Justin Bieber*  
BILLIONAIRE PLUTOCRAT . . . . . *Matthew Broderick*  
HUGH HEFNER . . . . . *Himself (from the grave)*  
CATERERS . . . . . *Guy Fieri, Paula Deen*  
GEORGES BATAILLE . . . . . *Harvey Weinstein*

## ON THE EROTIC MISPLACED

Ghosts crowd around church ceiling,  
holy scriptures strewn across the floor.  
On Facetime dances naked David  
(no body heat can cross that door),  
bellows tear-filled psalm of love  
to the tune of [is it too late now to say] *Sorry*.  
The tinny sound swells in the sanctuary:

*I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings  
until the disaster has passed.*

George: "We're free!" Jerry: "Sure, but you're still  
circumcised." Kramer: "Wowzers, George, put some  
clothes on!" George: "There was shrinkage!" Elaine:  
"When I see freaks in the street I never  
ever stare at them, and yet I'm careful  
not to look away, see, because I want  
the freaks to feel comfortable."  
Larry David chortles. Awkward silence.  
Kramer: "Here's to feeling good, *ALL* the time!"  
Ghosts exit, land jobs at a hip sex shop.

Billionaire enters sex shop, inquires:  
“You ghosts ever do a Ferris Bueller?  
You fake a stomach cramp, and when you’re  
bent over moaning and wailing, you lick  
your palms!” Larry David chortles. “Point me  
to the toys. Money is not an object!”  
Billionaire passes right through Elaine’s ghost,  
handles merchandise, surveys heft and girth,  
then, struck by heart attack, reaches up.  
Collapses.

Dismembered dildo drops, tumbles,  
bouncing off linoleum tiles. Thud,  
thud, thud, mocks a clumsy quickened pulse  
before it plops against the retail shelf.  
Fade in tinny Psalmist David reprise:

*They spread a net for my feet—  
I was bowed down in distress.  
They dug a pit in my path—  
but they have fallen into it themselves.*

Disembodied, sex shop ghosts float above  
the silicon scene, name tags dangling from work-  
issued polos, ogling the handsome corpse,  
impotent to help. “Who will clean this up?”  
Jerry asks. George laments, “I wanted  
to be the one person who doesn’t die  
with dignity.” Elaine: “Ugh, I hate people.”

*Selah.*

Spinning newspaper wipe (extra! extra!):  
ECCENTRIC BILLIONAIRE DEAD IN SEX SHOP.  
Last will and testament is read live on  
CNN by Hugh Hefner hologram—  
“my fortune is to be divided equally  
between every living beauty pageant  
contestant, every living ABC’s  
*The Bachelor* contestant, and every  
rap video dancer, if and only if  
they will kiss an incel before my  
preserved carcass.” The Psalmist fades in:

*I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—  
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,  
whose tongues are sharp swords.*

Billionaire’s body is disembowelled,  
embalmed, interred below bullet-proof glass,  
displayed in public mausoleum beside  
his private *Gallery of Valuable Art*,  
before the world’s costliest triptych:

Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*,  
Ingre’s *La Grande Odalisque*, and  
Manet’s *Olympia*. (Good Graces!)

*Selah.*

Private funeral reception held in  
the *Rothko Chapel*. Renowned caterers,  
but the time's different on Facebook™, feast served  
hours early, now rotting on the banquet  
table, untouched, smelling to high heavens,  
and the banner is over no one.

Will no one come  
eat from this feast? Black shining caviar,  
foie gras torchon, precious Château d'Yquem  
all languish at room temperature, lukewarm.  
Psalmist drops choreography, belts out:

*I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;  
I will sing of you among the peoples.  
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

Bataille arrives first, panics, squeezes out  
the window in the church bathroom, unable  
to bear the awkward silence, mugs to camera  
for catchphrase: “a kiss is the beginning  
of cannibalism.” Caterers are amused,  
catch eyes, lean toward each other, but're  
interrupted by a cacophony  
of notifications on vibrate in  
their front pockets,

someone liking some thing.

Seinfeld cast in unison: “We can see  
you read our messages, why'd you leave us  
on three dots!? You should never ghost a ghost!!”

Cut to Psalmist still on Facetime, sweat sheened,  
hot panting, hands stretched to heaven:  
“Why is it so hard to touch one another!?”

*Fin.*

- C. Leaked: attacks on Planned Parenthood by the new POTUS<sup>29</sup> provoked a White House staffer to slip him (it's still a him) her birth control on a daily basis. Several months later, as his breasts swelled and his stones shrunk, as his face seemed waxed and his sex drive waned, the President grew less bellicose, less dogged, prompting his wife to spend more time with him and his Secretary of Defense to demand he go for blood work. Toxicology revealed the sabotage and the White House aid went on the lam, until emerging as a contestant on ABC's *The Bachelor* and confessing to this year's hunk, the heir of a midsized weapons manufacturer, that she had given the President a taste of her own medicine.<sup>30</sup> The headlines were all hers, all through her jury trial and subsequent life sentence in a cushy minimum security joint where she made millions off her tell-all book deal, *Economy and Birth Control: I am Fulcrum*.
- D. A devoted vegan scientist who has spent her life developing lab-grown chicken protein<sup>31</sup> sends her frozen fertilized egg to India where surrogacy services are rather affordable now.

---

29 Timed to distract from heavy troop losses in the fight to free the Middle East.

30 On the night of the broadcast, the President took to Twitter to call her a liar and an enemy of the people and to announce new troop deployments to the Middle East.

31 It's revolutionary, Joe! In 2020, all we need to grow a cultured chicken breast is a snip from a fallen feather. The meat mostly sells in cheap frozen foods that I, thank God, never have to eat. But if my Obsidian Knife card doesn't come through quick, I'll be eating robot meat too. On the bright side, there's much less animal suffering. It won't be long before chickens learn to fly again!

- E. As the power of the vote has waned, the blunt force of boycott has waxed.
- i. Shame is the game. Thus:
    - a. The repentant are exiled.
    - b. *The shameless flourish.*
  - ii. Those who repent won't become president.
- F. The saddest man in Canada tells the boy and girl in Arby's to never stop cherishing one another.
- ( Girl holds the water in her mouth till they exit, then spits it at him, laughing! )*
- G. In the bright of day, where an animal leapt, a wound.





Lists like this one continue to dominate the internet scene.



The international best seller of 2020 is a self-help book titled *How to Write the Perfect Will: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Upon achieving this pinnacle so late in life, the lonely author contracts a novel disease while giving a keynote for social media influencers in Moscow. Fearing he might die, the old author flouts his home confinement and, for the first time in his life, brings himself to splurge on an erotic massage.

In the warm, candle-lit, poorly ventilated boudoir, he removes his mask and waits. Anxious and trembling, he rubs his hounddog jowls, trying to relax his jaw. He smells the vanilla scented candle. It flickers under his breath. He prowls around the room, following his shadow as it crawls over the massage table, onto the ruby walls, glides over tasteful army pin-ups and prints of neoclassical nudes.

When the door finally clicks open, the international best selling author of *How to Write the Perfect Will: A Guide for the Perplexed* is greeted by a beautifully built temporary foreign worker. She is adorned in scrubs and squeaky gloves, veiled by a sky-blue mask and a high-transparent anti-fog head-mounted plastic face shield. The ailing author is deflated at the sight; gives up a long crackling sigh.

But with an author's eloquence (and a fist full of cash), he persuades the masseuse to remove her clinical garb, just this once, just for him. She relents, tucks the cash in a drawer, snaps off her gloves. She approaches and turns around. Lets him hold the string in the back as she slowly walks away, unlooping the delicate knot.

As the scrubs slip from her shoulder a feverish magma roars up inside him, the ball in his throat nearly strangling him. He is seized by the translucent, almost iridescent down that covers the nape of her neck, spilling onto her shoulders and down her slender arms.

And then she turns. She pulls the mask below her chin, the elastics straining her ears into a feline ten-hut. At last she doffs her shield.

There he beholds the glittering corona at the inscrutable boundary of her warm black corneas. The author clutches his cramping abdomen in agony, summons all his strength to not explode. Instead, he coughs.

Lightheaded, moonstruck, he now sees her cloaked in ambient light, levitating, immense. Now gently smiling into his watering eyes. She reaches out. The author cannot bear to be touched. He flees.

Some time later, after returning home from the ICU, the same author is seen shredding his will before pitching a book to Jeff Bezos on achieving immortality through the power of never coming.

- A. In 2020, *Pity* and *Loathing* have at last divorced. There was no prenup. It's a goddamned mess. And we kids are caught in the middle.

One pities without loathing. One loathes without pitying. We loathe the oppressor. We pity the oppressed. You cannot be both: terrorist, soldier, refugee, coal miner, immigrant, cop, one another, one's self, the masked and the maskless. Every reality show needs a winner. We've waited through the commercial break, it's time for the results!

"Take a stand, you gatekeepers! Sort these sheep from the goats! You, gallery director! You, athlete! You, professor of completely unrelated discipline! Speak into the microphone, please! We need your hot take. You haven't the facts? Or the background? Your silence is loathsome! We always suspected you were part of the problem."

Poor gallery owner. 2015 Joey, can you believe anyone thought, much less said out loud, that art is *subjective*?

Beauty's in the eye of the bemoaning, the camel's in the eye of the needle, and nothing adds up when the solution is the problem.

The Arts must die.<sup>32</sup>

---

32 I'm sorry, buddy boy, I started tucking into some grand cru Gewürz when I got back from Navy's there and now I'm on my grass-green milk crate, aren't I?

B. The world's finest selfies are had in the Great Rift Valley, in the Afar Triangle, where Lucy was dug from the earth. She's a partial *Australopithecus afarensis* skeleton, as you know from your first-year Anthropology class and your magical day at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, where the gods still reside on the upper west side. They called her Lucy because they exhumed her from the earth while singing *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, clearly a reference to LSD, no matter what the Beatles tell you.<sup>33</sup> They finally returned her to Ethiopia, but the casts live on at museums globally, everywhere at once, and you simply must visit the taxidermy masterpiece<sup>34</sup> every time you're in town to walk among the gods.

Earlier this year (almost certainly a deepfake<sup>35</sup>), Buzz-Feed.biz published and later retracted a leaked manifesto from the acting US Secretary of Defense. He was alleged (but never criminally charged or proven) to have paid off museum staff to let him spoon (in uniform!) with the Lucy manikin and mock-suckle from her hairy breast:

---

33 Nothing like an acid trip to bridge a great rift, though the popular drugs in 2020 are pain killers: opioids, barbiturates, all that numbs.

34 "A conceptual reconstruction."

35 Hyperreal ventriloquy, videos that place a mask of any face over any other face to make dummies of us all. It starts in porn, then comes for celebrities, then comes for the president, as so many things do. It might not convince you that what you're seeing is real, but soon you worry everything else is fake. Don't worry, Joe, you aren't schizophrenic, you're just on the internet.

## GRANDCHILD VISITS MUSEUM

My dear *Australopithecus* grandma, you looked  
up at the same milk moon, May's lunar bloom, two eyes  
in those black orbits, toes cinched to soil. Imagine

your grandchild, quietly hurtling through space, through time,  
dusting grit from your half-moon skull, crooning Beatles.

A different grandchild exhumes moon-white mandible  
in public park. Shows students the prominent chin,  
parabolic arcade, enamel caked with meat.

Suddenly, the Peace Beyond tempts each dustless child:  
divine Mother's poem in fingerprint furrows.

Lucy, between plate glass panes and dull reflections,  
spy your grandchild, two-foot shuffle, t-shirt and jeans:  
takes aim, shoots. Camera flash over-exposes

your acetoned bones, cycling through hushed rotations,  
counting days in the dim museum afterglow.

No ears to hear. Your ancient drum song drifts away  
from the distant cave your child cannot discover  
—grown over. Outside, a midnight alley glimmers

in a melted penny metro, winding towards  
a silence, dashed by trash can cats.

Yet again this evening, the sun drums once  
on the rippling horizon. Museum  
admission hikes take effect tomorrow.

Grandma hopes you can afford to visit  
and tap the glass till Security comes.

- C. The here-unnamed Instagram™ influencer that drowned in a Blue Grotto photoshoot in Capri wills to their godchild their:
- account password
  - signature catchphrases
  - trademarked emoji formulations
  - precious, market-tested, meticulous hashtag list
  - logins for their t-shirt dropshipper and e-commerce platforms
  - dances

Their heir runs the enterprise into the ground when they take an unpopular stand for or against pineapples on pizza.

- D. Your Facebook™ or Instagram™ or YouTube™ can just figure out and send in your vote for you now—huge time-saver! And this way every vote's counted, no suppression, no fraud, everyone wins. It's pretty tough to boycott that.
- E. Young Joey, here's my 2020 GoodReads review of *How To Write The Perfect Will: A Guide for the Perplexed*:

Full disclosure, I'm a middling success at best, and I haven't any money at the end of each month, so perhaps this book wasn't written for blokes as broke as me, but I devoured it cover to cover in a single sitting, and I'll say this much:

To the best of my ability, I've cast my Will to Truth into the salty wind like an ancestor's ashes. They blew back into my open mouth and eyes.

Then I groped for a Will to Power that forfeits power.  
I laid down my arms, I leapt in faith, removed my  
real mask, and laid my head in the lap of love. But I  
couldn't fall asleep.

Alas, I am always and ever hounded by a Will to Debt  
no bone I gnaw is big enough to tame. No treat can  
bring this bitch to heel. No Orpheus song will charm  
this gnashing Cerberus. I owe so much and am owed  
so much, and it howls like a mutt and growls in my  
gut, the jealousy, the envy.

I'm sad to report that this here 2020 bestselling guide  
to writing the perfect will did not address even one  
of these *wills*.

When I chase the sun over the edge, I'm pretty  
sure I'll have nothing more to will to my loved ones  
besides:

- my Will to Power,
- the rights to my clickbait copy editing manual,
- my debt.<sup>36</sup>

So yes, I left this book feeling deeply impoverished  
and chided, not unlike the other reviewers I've read  
below. Thankfully, it did help me save money. I gave  
up:

- concerts
- galleries
- plays
- travelling far away
- buying too many gifts
- going out with friends

---

<sup>36</sup> Probably by then consolidated under just the one  
Obsidian Knife card, fingers crossed.



As a result, I've saved enough to gift myself the occasional all-out trip to Vegas. (Until 2020 of course—now we're all in the same boat.)

5 stars, would read again.

- F. The masseuse? Her real name was \_\_\_\_\_, as was the Bachelorette's.



New dispatches from the philosophy department:

A. When the path of least resistance:

- is littered with plastic and people;
- is slicked with oil or lube or guano, we know not what, and countless beings can hardly stand, balance, and follow the forward march;
- is a smokey dirt road, shoulders smouldering, as curious flecks resembling yeast or ash hover about in a deafening hush, songless and still but for our sighs of boredom;
- or roars with driverless traffic and the whirr of Amazon™ drones;<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> ...and we cannot hear through the two-way glass, however darkly, the: (i) old-fashioned or (ii) well-reasoned or (iii) theoretical (i) pleas for clemency, (ii) radical centrists and their blah punditry, and (iii) tormented wailing...

which door do we leave open, which doors (if any) do we now lock, and what is the new meaning of scarcity?

- B. And now these three remain: anger, fear, and shame. But the greatest of these is shame.
- C. “Is *shame* a sin?” asks the philosophy student of the theology professor. “I live on stolen land. I benefit from oppression. My sweater was sewn in a sweatshop!”

“Shame can be a mirror, a prompt to clean your face or bandage your gashes,” the theologian gently chides, “but if you dwell in a house made of mirrors, your shame becomes your narcotic, your broken image becomes your idol. Then blooms an erotics of masochism, then sadism, then schizophrenia. You will hear your own voice and mistake it for God. You will whip yourself for love of a feeling. You will applaud your contrition and delight in the ovation as it ricochets vacuously.”

“So yes?”

“Shame is only a sin when you dwell inside of it. Listen to His words, child: You are forgiven. Now go and sin no more.”

“But that’s impossible.”

The theologian shrugs.

The student plods away.

“I can make sacrifices.”

The student poorly knits a quixotic sweater from a local maker’s Ariadne™ brand gold yarn, listening to that Weezer song, for irony’s sake. The needles quietly tap their awkward applause.

Student gifts their old sweater to a homeless person.

The meek inherit the sweater.

( *The sweater that works.* )

- D. If you've made it this far, Joey, buckle up.<sup>38</sup> It's time to tell you about the *Never Man*.<sup>39</sup>

The *Never Man* is the big bad boogeyman of a new school of thinkers (and their mostly-student adherents). They call their school *Discontinental Philosophy* (or *Pyrosophy*), a dull pun from a deliberately self-sabotaging new wave of tragicomic philosophy.

*Discontinental* thought emerged from a global conglomerate of professors. They meet using Oculus VR in a virtual reality space called *The Cat Café*, a rather homey digital coffee bar but for an ersatz replica of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* hanging beside the door. One must be invited to enter.

---

38 You're only halfway through. Here comes the hard part. Perhaps you'd like to take a break? Maybe visit the restroom in your 2015 AirBnB bathroom in Berlin, I remember it has one of those weird Deutsche 'shelf' toilets you see all over Germany, the kind that lets you examine your shit in great depth and detail before dispatching it. (This might seem like an insignificant detail but I beg you to be the disciplined close reader you became under Drs. Westerman, Bayatrizi, Hanemaayer.) Take this dispatch up the block to that cozy Goldberg Café Bar on Reuterstrasse where we spent so many workdays writing penny stock analyses, where the saucy bar-keeps taught us how to order a beer in the most ridiculous, overwrought formulation, not unlike this most crucial seventeenth dispatch. *Kann ich bitte was bestellen eine bier?* Take a long sip of Dunkel and prepare to have your prized sense of *knowing* carved out like a tumour, you smug, darling, unscathed manchild. You know next to nothing.

39 This may seem like a ridiculous tangent but trust me, the *Never Man* has completely redrawn all political allegiance in 2020, and he's had his fair share feasted from you.

Their detractors<sup>40</sup> have disdained and dismissed the anonymous faction as “nothing more than furious, terrified, and miserable iGen academics who are scratching at the hand that feeds them because they feel vacuum-packed like helpless kittens into a life sentence of post-doctoral limbo.” I’m paraphrasing, of course.

You know *Discontentinental* works when you see them: the mode is quiet yet biting, suspicious yet resigned, dour yet chuckling, and even mystic at times, however glum. For the *Pyrosophers*, our society’s present state of affairs is not some *betrayal* of the gospel of philosophy, it is its fulfilment. They’ve abandoned the long-held belief that philosophy is the antidote to all that is misguided in our society. Instead, they see our present state of unrest, mistrust, and shame as the culmination of all western philosophical thought:

“Our teetering house is slapped together from answers, the only answers that can unfold from the unquestioned questions we’ve posed for ourselves.”

*and*

“We laugh, weep, and rage at this drunk that gropes under streetlight for the keys he lost in the pitch-dark park.”

- E. As a rule, author anonymity is a *sine qua non* of *Discontentinental* works. It’s their most paramount and countercultural thesis. The *Pyrosophers* could be everywhere among us, but like the Eleusinian Mysteries, their anonymity is their membership card, masked by a blockchain and an avatar. It’s not, they argue,

---

40 Ranging from Judith Butler to Jordan Peterson.

to eliminate the individual but to preserve the individual—to resist being deconstructed. To resist being pigeonholed or challenged for anything *other* than the thoughts they express. And to thereby resist being dominated by one another or anyone else.

The *Pyrosophers* believe that any form of authorial attribution would:

- i. Accrue power to specific individuals: “The philosophers have only found new ways of seeing. The point, however, is to dance in the dark.”
- ii. Invite surveillance and all the wrong questions: “The philosophers have only installed new windows for the *Never Man* in various ways. The point, however, is to leave the house.”
- iii. Cram the *Discontinental* indictment into the totems of 2020: “The philosophers have only locked the doors in various ways. The point, however, is to cut a (w)hole in the roof.”<sup>41</sup>
- iv. Allow Financial Actuaries and their data mining AI to match the content of *Discontinental* works

---

41 And so it continues: “We deke your privilege algorithm. We will not be calculated.

“All of humanity, to its very core, must discover how flattened and mechanized and afraid and furious and piteous and loathing they’ve become through the goddamned *counting*.

“We will not be digested as data points, we will not be nested into hierarchies of suffering, we will not have our views *valued* by our vantage points.

“We are *Argos Panoptes*. The chorus of our writing will unveil the elephant whole, all of us from everywhere writing as one.

“We will not be problematized. For we are not the problem. And neither are you.

“Each and every *one* of us arrives.”

with the author's name, age, income, job, race, sex, gender, sexual preference, education, ability, marital status, browser history, and past purchases, and thereby reverse engineer their fiscal credibility, correlate what it learns with other *Pyrosophers'* data and their works, and start writing *Discontinental* loan applications based on *Never Man's* infernal logic of numbers: "The philosophers have only made names for themselves and everything else. The point, however, is to stop being counted."

- v. Result in criminal prosecution: "The philosophers have only arrested the world in various ways. The point, however, is to kiss while it spins."<sup>42</sup>

These *Pyrosophers* are a threat so alarming they've suddenly obliterated the line between left and right (at a moment when that line had become a trench-footed, mustard gas'd, over-the-top stalemate). Surprise! The left and right *can* band together after all, in all their futile venom for the *Discontinental* zeitgeist. Because anyone with any stake in the way things already are sees these wordy shit disturbers as the *real* disruption, not Silicon Valley disruption, not protestors in the gallery disruption, not even terrorist disruption. This is burn-down-our-own-house disruption.

---

<sup>42</sup> The *Pyrosophers* can be rather dramatic. As if anyone this educated didn't have a damn fine cup of coffee with their podcasts this morning and won't have a damn fine drink of wine with their friends tonight (under normal circumstances).

- F. You are so innocent... my relentless, inquisitive, hungry young Joey boy, it will take you all these five years to unlock why the *Pyrosophers* are so effective: It's the *trolling*. That's their mighty hinge and their bolt cutter all the same. These already anonymous *Pyrosophers* go further still. They refuse to commit to anything *Discontinental* works have said before, hiding behind the blank space, \_\_\_\_\_, they use to sign their work. They are a faceless mass of voices, unmasked behind their single mask, and refuting them based on established principles of debate is useless. They are a hydra, and each snake will slip through your fingers whether you behead it or not, if you ever discover which end is the head.

Conservatives think they're antifa. Liberals think they're the alt-right.

Any 'proofs' and 'rebuttals' deployed against them are met with laughter, with ridicule, with the glum chuckling brush-off: "the contestant hasn't comprehended a goddamned thing about TWOCTSMT-SODHFILGDGTATYPGK" (*The Wind Of Change That Spins Madly The Sword Of Damocles, Hanging From Its Last Goddamned Golden Thread Above This, Your Precious Gordian Knot*—represented online as [ WIND-BLOWING EMOJI ] [ SWORD EMOJI ] [ HAIRCUT EMOJI ] [ YARN-BALL EMOJI ] [ UPSIDE-DOWN-SMILEY-FACE EMOJI ], reminding the conservative and liberal alike that this is all a joke and that is why it's a truer true, and if you can't laugh, you are the knot.



- G. Here's a work that was published in thousands of tiny string-tied scrolls littered from the spire of Trinity Church in Manhattan's Financial District. The media has speculated that the fellow scattering these scrolls was a wall street forex analyst or disillusioned *Prophet*. He was painted grass-green from head-to-toe and wearing a white toga. He escaped after the act and remains unidentified. Probably works from home now. Blurry smartphone pics were sold to network news for who-knows-how-much, splashed across our screens for days during the search:

# NEVER MAN COMING

Here comes the *Never Man* now!

He casts far and wide the coupons for sweaters;  
a daisy chain of office towers

sprout from his footsteps  
with a window for every desk and matches on every toilet.  
Employees swim to the glass this very moment  
to make supplication to the heavy rain coming,  
whirling their pens pensively between thoughts of returns.

No one watches as they watch  
the sapphire thunderhead from the 24th floor,  
chanting as it marches, *Après moi, le déluge!*

*Never Man cometh, earth-shaker, chewing Trident.  
Our bonds are underwater, our securities, underwater.  
Never Man saveth! Who else counts the every drop*

*Never Man* funds a deepwater mining exploration sub, can withstand the pressure of the hadal zone.

Hopes he'll zero in on a new Leviathan  
among a boundless cache of golf ball  
sized nodules of nickel, manganese, cobalt,  
and every other battery metal.  
Instead spies spam tins, rubber gloves,  
even a mannequin head  
floating past his uncrackable camera lens.

*Never Man tallies every kiss,  
marks it the moment after.  
Will he ever have enough?*

Here, *Never Man*, hold this thread  
as I walk away.

See Joe, the *Discontinental Pyrosophers* look down from their 'scat-splattered perch in the *La-De-Da*' (their term for the Ivory Tower) and own the bird's eye view.

"You see *progress* down there!?" they tease you. "Or maybe you see *oppression* down there!?" they troll. "I see how 2500 years of western philosophy has moulded civilization into a slobbering footrace between Achilles and a fat tortoise (shell honey-combed in logos like a goddamned Nascar). Both parties wheeze from exertion. The swift-footed, noble, furious demigod overtaken by the geriatric, shell-sheltered, indomitable reptile, and Zeno ROFLing in the *La-De-Da*. *Overtaken! Overtaken! Overtaken by infinite halves!*"

Perhaps a better example: the unknown *Pyrosopher* that hacked The Economist™ Instagram™ account. A little too Adbustery for my taste but iconic of the movement in its own way. In a live feed, in witness-protection-voice, he or she murmurs their poem as it trickles down in a cascading chyron:

## EVER MORE / EVER LESS

Man *SPRINTS*  
stronger faster better harder  
closer closer closer closer  
to all he always hoped for,  
yet he's  
ever more in jeopardy,  
flung into a Frogger game;  
ever less edified,  
groping for a door handle;  
ever more nauseated,  
Ixì' on the rainbow wheel;  
ever less equal or pleased  
by degrees of measurement  
ever more atomic,  
ever more astronomic.

We up here dare to peer over the precipice,  
down from our ivory perch. We dare suffer  
vertigo, dare to jeer gravity, dare fall  
and die to spy *what?*:

Ever more sweaters and ever less golden yarn;  
ever more security, ever more insecure;  
ever more new content, ever less contentment;  
record anxiety, all the more 'apps for that'.

Ever more Float Rooms and ASMR versus  
ever more processors, squeakers, and barks.  
More new Escape Rooms despite all our *freedom*.  
Investors and debtors are crying for more.

Ever more garbage  
and ever more shame;  
ever more garbage  
and ever less room for it.  
Ever more garbage  
awareness campaigns;  
shame fills the dumpster  
till we can't maneuver it.

Ever more windows when we wanted doors;  
ever more data, ever less nuance;  
ever broader strokes, ever less canvas;  
ever more loan poems, no poets owed.

VR keeps getting funded, explain to us why  
when we all reside in  
ever more immersive  
hyperreality—  
the Google Map  
in actual fact  
laid atop  
the whole space it displays!  
While the terra beneath  
rots without air or sun  
light. Is this an error?  
Do we turn left or right?  
“Siri, get directions  
to somewhere uncovered.”

Ever more dog walkers, ever fewer *donne*  
    *Romane* with free time  
    to feed the stray cats in  
    *Torre Argentina*,  
    the Campus Martius ruins,  
    prowling the curia of  
    Pompey's Theatre, dozing  
    in the dusk on that stained  
    scab of land where Caesar  
    was stabbed 23 times  
    (high noon, the Ides of March)<sup>43</sup>  
    one naïve cleaving thrust  
    for every chromosome  
    knotted up inside him  
    (this cat pans placidly,  
    slow as time, greets your eyes,  
    mutely stirs the salty brine  
    of human memory:  
    *Power cannot be rent*  
    *by a knife—only rented.*)

- \_\_\_\_\_

---

43 Just wait till you see the Ides of March in 2020, Joey boy.

The ‘adults in the room’ roll their eyes and congratulate the *Pyrosophers* on graduating a single level up from their instapoetry.

But most of us common folk don’t dismiss these anonymous thinkers and their odd indictments so quickly, however formulaic or kitschy or undisciplined they may seem. Besides, who knows who is writing what!? Who knows how many of them there are? Who knows if its fucking Banksy for crying out loud! We are still and always on tenterhooks for their next dispatch, glued to the 16chan™ board where photos are posted of their next piece in whatever strange medium they’ve chosen. Our ears listen through the immense noise of everyday life for the *Discontinental* thread’s notification ting, phones turned all the way up.

We wait for them, whether we agree or not, for there is something powerful in these ideas, something sensible in their unknowing. This *feels* like a *new* power, a power that does not *accrue* power, a power that cannot be located, so cannot be celebritized or crowned or worshipped or deferred to, cannot betray if these thinkers are bullish or bearish, dovish or hawkish, tender or terrorists.

Theirs is a power that trolls your cute little critique of politics when you get on your grass-green milk crate and scream how our emperor is naked. In response to this perennial revelation the *Pyrosophers* sewed an enormous purple banner they hung in the night from Mount Rushmore:

## CATCH A HOT BREATH FOR THE NEVER MAN

Our emperor isn't naked! That we'd be so blessed  
to have a naked David dance before our mobs.  
We'll settle for Hans Christian Anderson himself  
if he's willing and revivable. No, no, no,  
our emperor is not naked. Our emperor

long ago decayed to dust inside his plush robes.  
These purple robes that float about us are all we  
have left (and they play the part more convincingly  
than any emperor before). And no, no, no,

our emperor was not a raptured Elijah  
we refused nor a colossal Ozymandias  
we outlived. The last man to die in these vestments  
was simply undressed, cleaned, buried, and di-  
gested by the chthonic monsters that keep our soil

a'bubbling. We were all too distracted by the  
funeral galas and coronation parties—  
eulogizing and toasting and slipping away  
to the corners to have our heated hushed debates

on whether we still require a monarch at all—  
that we didn't notice our own hot air begin  
to inflate the laundered imperial vestments  
like a slowly bloating bouncy castle, brought back  
to life without us appointing a soul to wear them,

all of us too scared to look stupid, too timid  
to point out the subterfuge (if this had happened  
today it would have been tweeted in all caps!)  
but people played pretend for a long enough time



until we all forgot. We forgot. We went on  
hailing our leaders like they are the ones leading,  
when it's in fact still our hot air inside that frock,  
our hot hot air bobbing in and out the halls of  
empire, sporting that Purple like a prizefighter.

It releases our gas back to us whenever  
we try to find some time and fresh air to work out  
the big ballot issues. And now look, our holy  
robes do the harlem shake, they're dabbing on Ellen,

they photobomb leaders from less bellicose states,  
draped not on a king but *the-never-arriving*  
(those stale old ideas crowned cosmic quiddity)  
holy cloths draped upon our big hot puff of what?  
On the clump of air exhaled through another rote

incantation of endless growth economics—  
*the meaning of freedom, or who-to-watch-out-for.*  
They billow up into a human-shaped spectre  
flopping left and right in the unmanned Purple, our

w a c k y            w a v i n g  
i n f l a t a b l e            a r m  
f l a i l i n g            t u b e  
m a n,            b e g g i n g  
f o r            b u s i n e s s,  
s m a c k i n g            i n t o  
p e d e s t r i a n s.

- \_\_\_\_\_

This is the power of the *Pyrosophers*. They have revealed to us that this ancient and sacred regalia of empire is not donned by our leaders at all, they argue that these garments have become an unmanned monarchy that *leads our leaders*, that rules over every nation alike (whether they like it or not).

These vestments are donned by a gaseous mannequin fashioned in our form from our own exhaust, formed from ideas we've forgotten were only ideas! And not even *our* ideas! Ideas we let fester and breed a robbers' den of old gods reborn. Petty thieving gods. A viral infection of itching daemon Cronus wannabes that snatch and fence and sell off our every free moment and devour the best of our offspring!<sup>44</sup>

They've come at last for those most treasured, most reflexive moments of reflection. Those moments we most need to actually examine these goddamned ideas and maybe pose a few ideas of our own making, ideas that might not result in a society that daily feasts on what little time we have here on Earth. And perhaps only the abrupt halt of a war or a solar flare

---

44 Get on the ground floor of TikTok, Joey (I'll go long if it ever IPO's!)

or a pandemic quarantine could win us back enough time to really re-examine them.<sup>45</sup>

In response to the Mount Rushmore poem, another purple cloth prose poem was hung in the night from the Pantheon in Rome:

---

45 I'm just an onlooker, Joe, but it seems to me that time and space are the *Never Man's* ultimate demand / plunder / inexhaustible privation. To the *Never Man*, power is a zero-sum game, and the essence of that power is a claim on some increment of your time or smidgeon of your space that he maintains cannot be cohabited or dually purposed. But that's not the real human experience.

## CRONUS DEVOURS

Alas, we haven't the free time to fix this now,  
have we? We're stuck with all this hot air, the altars  
to our hot hot air: the roads and schools and programs,  
the huffing lungs we've evolved to breathe *our* hot air.

The Purple was purple for it was soaked with blood  
and wine. Then Purple purchased purple people with  
bread and circuses. That panned out for the priestly  
leisure class whose only job was to iron it,

to dust the altar and observe the holidays,  
and to keep a close eye on the damned ideas  
so everyone stays in their damned lane, for better  
or worse. But no more.

The ideas wear the Purple now. And they are  
ballooning from neglect. We priests cannot keep up,  
busied as we are tending the dialectic  
blossoms sprung from these selfsame ideas. Pity,

even the most leisured of our priestly classes  
have no free time left to maintain all the altars,  
much less the ideas. Even *our* dearest few  
moments are devoured by the mind-numbing labours:

the double tapping and tedious standing O's,  
the GRATUITOUS SUPERFLUOUS  
NONESENTIAL

“WORK” we must all pretend is ABSOLUTELY KEY  
so we can earn enough to make the minimum

payment on our Obsidian Knife and one day,  
if we all work like dogs, bank enough extra scratch  
in the kitty to dollar-vote for a change of  
direction we all sense we need. Quick, look busy!

*Never Man* is coming.

- \_\_\_\_\_

Like the Mount Rushmore poem, authorities remove this and tuck it away in a museum archive, but the photos survive online and conspiracy theorists work day and night to interpret them. Before long another nameless, faceless *Pyrosopher* replies with a purple cloth poem nocturnally draped on the steps of the Palace at Knossos in Crete:

## BULLISH

Blind olm, blind bard, we're in a pitch dark labyrinth!  
What change of direction will possibly save us?  
Hot breath of Minotaur fogs up our specs, he wears  
a suit superbly sewn, looking like *Never Man*,  
proffers pen and tell-sells us another knife card,  
reads us our loan application. Stands too close, huffs,  
glassy eyed, awkward horns bump the wall, illumines  
the page with his iPhone™ light, no doubt recording.

- \_\_\_\_\_

But then yet another *Pyrosopher* comes along and  
objects with a purple cloth prose poem floated down  
the Suez Canal:

## A FINITE AREA WITH AN INFINITE PARAMETER

we're only in a labyrinth  
in our lonely brittle dreams

as a crowd we race through purple  
dusk in a narrowing canal

an arrow-straight canal we sail  
at incomprehensible speeds

constantly gaining yet only  
by halves *the-never-arriving*

deafening howl of wind drowns out  
our rhetoric and rented needs

what asymptotic glum fractals  
of unbecoming we've become

- \_\_\_\_\_

Then another photo of an anonymous poem appears on 16chan™ the next day. The author concurs with the Suez poem. This author's response is sewn into the sail of a small commercial fishing boat:

## TIED TO THE MAST

And we rope our ever-stretching robes to the mast  
of our canal-bound boat, for we can't conceive of  
a Purple so radiantly *true and living*,

and we're anxious anxious anxious our beloved  
emperor seems about to fly away from us!—  
yet somehow not seeing these robes are so empty.

Observe our Purple sail affixed on the towering mast,  
already taut full of our hot thoughts to begin with,  
the lung of *never-arriving*, flapping flag-like.

Oh sacred Purple lung, swell larger and larger now  
with the extra hot air of our YouTube™ reviews,  
our fragmenting manifestos, our treadmill pant.

The sail bulges larger still, yanking at the mast!  
The exhaled multitude of our wheezy chuckles  
at churlish memes, gassy guffaws at podcast news,



yearning gasps at travel snaps, all these jittered  
skittering breaths we vent when we enter the fray  
of a comment-thread battle, huffing and puffing.

All this cherished air gathers into the Purple;  
the sheer wind whipped up by our opposable thumbs  
as they outrage type a tempest up and into  
our Empire's straining lung,

purple veins popping through our white knuckles  
clung  
to the reinforced mast. Bloody old robes, the most  
surging sailcloth we've ever known. See how we dash

down our under-construction canal with a thrust  
and inertia only the *Never Man* ventures  
to measure. Shall we sing? Or stuff our ears with wax?

- \_\_\_\_\_<sup>46</sup>

---

46 Meme commentators retort that if we all wear a mask that'd cork our hot air. To which the *Pyrosophers* reply "the contestant hasn't comprehended a goddamned thing about TWOCTSMTSODHFILGDGTATYPGK."

A few days later, hundreds of influencers in Capri started posting photos from their yachts, framed between their hotdog legs, showing another titanic purple-stitched poem some *Discontinental Pyroso-pher* draped over the rocky crags of Le Sirenuse<sup>47</sup>:

---

47 Readers ‘debate’ (scream in all-caps) the meaning of these locations online as much if not more than the actual content of the poem. *Le Sirenuse* are the rocky crags near Capri where the mythic Sirens are said to sing their enchanted song. In some stories, the wingéd beauties lure sailors to shipwreck and watery death when, in lustful abandon, the oarsmen pursue the Sirens’ voice. In other stories, their song lulls the sailors into a dreamy sleep. Then they climb aboard to tear apart and devour them.

As you’ll remember from your intro to Greek Mythology class, Odysseus (Ulysses) stopped his men’s ears with wax and tied himself to the mast so he could strain against restraint and still hear their enchantments, unable to satisfy his urge. Jason & His Argonauts, on the other hand, survived the Siren song when Orpheus played on his lyre a song sweeter still, a song of heroism, drowning out their voices.

Yet the rabbit hole goes deeper and the ancients offer our 2015’s and our 2020’s deeper lessons yet, Joey: these same Sirens were initially the entourage of Persephone (Proserpine). After Persephone was abducted by Hades (Pluto), her despairing mother Demeter (Ceres) gave the Sirens wings to help in the search. When Demeter discovered Persephone’s fate, she cursed the Sirens for not preventing her abduction. The curse states that the Sirens would only live until we mortals could hear their song and still sail by. This footnote could and should bloom into its own treatise, but I’m afraid I haven’t the time, young Joey. I have so many clickbait assignments, and I must get these dispatches to you as quickly as possible. Let it suffice to say that at some point in these five years you will make John William Waterhouse’s *The Siren* (1900) your screensaver.

## HOLD YOUR BREATH

Our best and our brightest gather on the poop deck  
for an emergency global conference, sweat sheened,  
hot panting, hustling to invent brakes strong enough  
to slacken the sail without harming the vestments,

to bridle a velocity that escalates  
to the power of they-know-not-what before the  
next time they can find a moment to measure it,  
*IF!* they can shoo away the crush of lovers play'ng

Jack & Rose. We passengers, we Leo's and Kate's,  
we lean on the wind, we peer off the prow, we gawk  
at all that water and all those workers below,  
as our clipper blasts down this unfinished canal

that an ever better nourished underclass are  
digging drenched in sweat, only just creating space  
inches before the bow-pulpit crunches into  
the rocky terminus. But we won't crash without

first crushing the navvies caught digging between it.  
"Perhaps all those bodies will soften the blow!?" No  
wonder these diggers keep dropping their shovels and  
trying to jump in our boat! But don't they all know!?

They'll die on board with us  
if they're not down there in front

DIGGING.

- \_\_\_\_\_

Hell... the *Pyrosophers* might be right, Joe. And the answer is right in front of us! Just cut the ropes!!! Let the robes fly away and take all that hot air of so many failed philosophies with them.

Or should I just give up and give in? Do my own little ritual war dance on the deck!? What do you say? We can all party like it's the last night before we smash into smithereens!? Tear off our masks and clothes and sound our barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world!? Shall I become Alaric reincarnate!? Sack Rome, roast the meat, drink the milk, plunder the cellars!?<sup>48</sup> Or shall I denounce Satie and his stifling *Gymnopédies*? Shall I reach all the way down into the shadows, gather up my heart, and hold it in the Tiber till the dried blood washes away!?

I apologize, young Joe. I've been through a lot these last five years. I sound like a screamo band that took classics. I'm on my fifth glass of the '15 Pacalet Gevrey-Chambertin and feeling performative, plus I'm telling you, buddy, it's all about the broad strokes these days, with the big brushes! It's the broad strokes that get the clicks!<sup>49</sup>

- H. Here's what some commentators think these *Pyrosophy* ramblings are really about: these philosophers have given up on calling forth their students and fellow citizens to the mantle of the *Übermensch*.

---

48 There's another *Pyrosophy* poem (here omitted) where the scientists on the poop deck contend that if we can get all our hot air even hotter and rope the robes to the mast just right, we can get lift off like a big old hot air balloon and leave behind the canal altogether (and the diggers with it).

49 Copies of my book, *The Broad Strokes: Clickbait for Entrepreneurs*, are still available.

They concede that half their students will be lucky to be Uber drivers. They instead turn from exhortations to denouncements, coining confounding parables of their trickster god, their totem whom they love to hate, the *Niemensch*, or the *Never Man* in *Englisch*. The *Pyrosopher* impregnates the *Never Man* with enough chaos<sup>50</sup> to shatter the rigour of their philosophical foundations and instead blast a new quarry's worth of meaning into the conceptual landscape.

Who is the *Never Man*? How to faithfully sketch a boogeyman these thinkers have deliberately milked for ambiguity? The *Pyrosophers* troll anyone that tries to answer questions categorically, especially this question. But here goes: the *Never Man* is the diffuse, jell-o-ey, irrational concept (and thereby irrefutable) at the core of the *Discontinental* system (if we can call it a system at all). And the *Never Man* must remain malleable this way, he is an improv character, puppeteered into yes~and'ing his own prosecution. He is the marionetted judge, jury, and defendant in his own kangaroo court, all the walls covered in mirrors, trying to play it cool, looking like a selfie-starved Josef K in a crowd-luring Kusama infinity room.

The more *Discontinental* work you read, the less sure you are about anything, especially this iconic *Niemensch*. Is the *Never Man* a mythic figure or no? Is he a Sisyphus or a Tantalus? A billionaire or a bureaucrat? A distant Father or a projection of the Father? Or a statistician that has forgotten that averages are made up of outliers? E.g.:

---

50 Enough chaos that his limitless Will to Order proves futile.

A small army of volunteers has crowdsourced their computing power to search for Mersenne prime numbers day-in-day-out since 1996. It takes about 12 to 60 months for this legion of conscripted servers to compute their way to a new ‘highest prime known’. The last one found was in 2018. It would be frivolous for me and a spoiler for them if I shared even the abbreviated version with you, 2015 Joey.

Needless to say, it’s a meaningless needle in a bale of numbers, a nauseous chain of digits whose only use is for treating insomnia. In short, every few years this legion finds out how many more sheep you have to count before you get to a sheep that can’t be divided (except by one of itself, as they say, a caveat that’s so redundant it seems to prove the poetic point the *Pyrosophers* are driving at,  $\neg\_(\neg)\_/\neg$ ).

If you want a sense of how vapid this all is, you could type the entire number into a default setting MS Word doc. Clippy will pop up from his digital grave and say “this one fucking number will take 6,629 pages to display and about 14 reams of paper to print, would you prefer I sing you *The Song That Never Ends* from *Lamb Chop’s Sing-Along*© until you fall asleep, then just quietly power myself down?”

I say all this to shyly venture my own vignette of who or what the *Pyrosophers* mean by the *Never Man*. By this same insipid logic, the *Never Man* treasures this new data point, this dry knowledge. For him, this indivisible 24,862,048 digit-long prime integer is akin to that many new *tactile* digits added to his velvet

glove and iron grip.<sup>51</sup> New fingers for staying the steering wheel. New fingers for tapping out hollow headlines. For encrypting our credit cards. For sewing us sweaters. It seems the *Never Man* doesn't count with his fingers; it's his counting that adds fingers. And he's saving one for you. Look! Right this moment, his finger points at you. You've been counted. Take comfort! You count for something.<sup>52</sup>

*E pluribus unum*, am I right?

What I can glean with confidence: The *Never Man* measures his plank walk in Planck lengths. His utmost concern is the infinitesimal, the recordable, the *data point*. He deals in all that is incremental, all that accumulates, all that can be counted, all that can be listed, all that can be *saved* without betraying the logic of the number:

- i. the numb comfort of the numerable;
- ii. the rations doled out by ratios;
- iii. the fractures splinted by fractions;
- iv. the boundless gravity of the decimal point, yawning like a black hole, like a Google Maps pin stamping 'you-are-here' just right—down low and to the right—of every integer; the decimal point squatting like a bottomless pit beside the foot of your whole number, the ever-present chasm where you crack into a countable infinity, to the *power* of infinity.

---

51 And the velvet is no doubt Purple.

52 What number are you? One of those gadfly one's that can only be divided by itself? Are you prime?

By this dark dry counting, finger by finger, the *Never Man* wraps his hand around all that can be known and divided and separated and isolated and observed and repeated, then pours it all into the crucible, the mortar, the excel spreadsheet to therein be melted, pulverized, and rendered into *power itself*, confessed or betrayed or dispatched from-the-ground-up.

*Never Man* counts it a virtue to ignore all else. In 2020 he is perhaps destined to be cancelled and replaced by his exact opposite, Joey: A culture that assaults all data, unleashing an obverse tragedy that scares the *Pyrosophers* more than this old devil-they-know. God forbid the *Never Man* is replaced by some utopia that poorly knits a Purple robe for everyone and their dog. The point is to bury these robes, let Purple be purple, and wear what we want.

- I. The motto of *Discontinentalism*<sup>53</sup> (I'll spare you the Latin): *Oh Never Man, is the arrow soaring toward you truly motionless?* Their unofficial crest is a purple Mobius strip bracketed by a cat and a dog rampant, a sword dangling above the strip and a golden ball of yarn floating below.
- J. The purple robes suite is only one such publicly hashed out *Discontinental* poetic. There are so many. Here is a final suite for your consideration, Joe—

---

53 Nota Bene: it's *Dis-* not *Dys-* *continental*, in reference to Dis, the walled city at the very bottom of Dante's *Inferno*. In the *Pyrosophers'* defence, if it seems histrionic to compare the most prosperous age of man to the bottom of hell, recall:

- i. In Dis suffers Satan, the most beautiful of created things who turned and betrayed its own creator.



a more oneiric suite if you ask me. This first transmission was found graffitied in three separate stanzas on the philosophy, history, and economics buildings at the Sorbonne, respectively:

- 
- ii. Dis is not in flames. It is frozen over for lack of love. Or more precisely, it is frozen over by the futile, flightless, robotic flapping of Lucifer's colossal wings, all sound drowned out by the industrial wheeze and brain freeze migraine. For Satan has rejected God for the sake of *freedom*, but when he tries to fly, the beating of his wings freezes him in place, and the harder he flaps, the more frozen in place he is.
  - iii. In Dis, Dante could sense neither death nor life.
  - iv. Dante depicts Lucifer strictly as *negation*, all that God and goodness are not.
  - v. For the mundane and uninventive sin of trading Christ for cash, Judas Iscariot is eternally gnawed like jerky in Lucifer's mouth, with his head pointed inward so he can't see anything aside from the mouth that consumes him. It's a punishment suited to how boring and predictable his rebellion to Christ's radical new form of power was. 0% on Rotten Tomatoes.
  - vi. In contrast, Cassius and Brutus, for trying to sunder the chromosome of imperial power with the business dealing end of a mere dagger, are chewed with their heads facing out. Their eyes can feast on the frigid chaos their far more sensational act of restorative/revolutionary zeal carved out of life with the pride of a knife, another negation of Christ's radical new form of power-as-forfeiture.
  - vii. And lastly, the moment before Dante spies all this sad gore, he witnesses a man languidly gnawing on another man's brain—as if brains are all there's left to make a meal of this far down. A very *Discontinental* image indeed.

## VIGNETTES FOR RENEWED REFLECTION 1, 2, 3

1

\_\_\_\_\_ reaches out and away and away and grazes  
the space where the wordless note strikes.  
Out and away flutter rebuttals and proofs,  
let loose to the turning wind, blown ash  
of combusted refuse. Who of us will refuse  
new names for the day beyond or before today?

2

On the pew of history, a slew of whoopee cushions.  
Some taut with laughing gas, others the tear gas,  
but most are inflated by your favourite philosophers.  
Saved for the throne, the cushiest of whoopees.  
Their fumes fill the stadium as a child swells a womb,  
“Who will blow these back up?” the spectators heckle.  
Plebs in the nosebleeds laugh themselves to tears.

3

In church foyers, farm boot-rooms, palace curias,  
impatient guests are entertained with promises  
of whole milk and fresh bread that is said to await them.  
A pinned tab opens every morning  
to this same web page  
and hero image.  
Y o u   s c r o l l  
d o w n   a n d  
d o w n  
a n d  
d o  
w  
n  
.

- \_\_\_\_\_

- K. These are all just koans of a kind, watery riddles that run uphill. This one was seen scrolling down a theatre exterior outside the Edmonton International Street Performers Festival for all of ten minutes, long enough to be photographed and shared internationally before the projector was located and confiscated by authorities:

## MOON LANDING

Earthbound, Summer 2019 rolls toward you. You try to plant your feet on something flat but it keeps rolling, faster faster.

At the Dentist, in the waiting room,  
a television tells its vision. Watch:  
A grey-fuzzed memory—today  
is the 50th anniversary  
of a time so like and unlike today,  
a man on the moon .  
(YES, HE'S THERE, WHETHER IT HAPPENED OR NOT)

Flat flat screen broadcasts the scene,  
winking eye of Luna, scored to whispering static,  
a pristine voice lists insignificant facts  
concerning what we know and what's been shown,  
not a thought

on what it is *to know*  
and what it is *to show*  
and what it is *to sense*  
and their strange conflation.

Look: some One stands on the moon. If \_\_\_\_ waves,  
the light will arrive and we'll know \_\_\_\_ says hello.  
A patient leaps to their feet in the waiting room,  
sprints to the screen, screams through toothache:

—It's faked! It's faked!

*This moon is made from a galaxy of pixels!*

Outburst timed brilliantly as outside the window  
a mute comedy troop of musical  
whoopee cushion street performers battle  
a vuvuzela marching band in a Strauss-off  
(of Zarathustra)

Addended to the end of this poem was an odd, equivocating acknowledgement that, and I quote, “This poem is (that much is metaphysically true), this poem is being *displayed* (that much is phenomenologically true, for those with eyes to see), and this poem is being displayed *on Treaty 6 Territory* (that much is politically true), yet so long as you and your *Never Man* maintain a false dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, all land will be considered property. So long as land is considered property, all land is ‘stolen’. So long as all land is stolen, everyone lives on stolen land, ontologically, including the people it was stolen from. So long as theft is considered a wrong, everyone is guilty if you go back far enough. One might thereby argue that *no one is guilty*. But is this how you *feel*? Only \_\_\_\_\_ can wash away this guilt. Is this sophistry, apologia, or the inconvenient truth? \_DK!” What do you make of that, Joey?

- L. In response to that Moon Landing poem, this work was mailed to the European Commission’s census office<sup>54</sup> in Brussels:

---

54 They thought it was a bomb. Turned out to be a poem written in Sharpie™ on a defunct Macbook™. Sure looked like a bomb though.

## CRY TO DREAM AGAIN

—enter *Never Man* and Poet

Do not relate to me your *dreams*,  
Poet, they offend my senses.  
My survey inquires only the following,  
and you will make your confession  
immediately via this online form.  
Check your push notifications now.

—exit *Never Man*

Poet reviews form. Answers. Sends.

Screen objects in bright red letters:

\*There was a problem with your inputs\*

1.       How did you awake?

( WHICH ALARM CLOCK DO YOU OWN? )

*waking up is another other  
with you inside their glance*

is not a valid answer\*

2. How did you sleep?

( ON A SCALE OF ONE TO ZERO. )

*neither sleeping nor waking  
in an isle so full of noises*

is not a valid answer\*

3. Where did you awake?

( WHAT PLACE DID YOU AWAKE? )

*inside a great empty hallway  
where a wordless voice beckons  
but to where to where to where  
a hallway of countless locked doors  
handles rattled till breath runs out  
falls on floor cries for rest  
a Caliban cry cries to dream  
to dream to dream again*

is not a valid answer\*

4. When did you awake?

( WHAT TIME DID YOU AWAKE? )

*cannot sleep awake*

is not a valid answer\*

5. How long did you sleep?  
( HOW MANY MINUTES? )

*how long is a dream*

is not a valid answer\*

6. How do you know for certain?  
( WHO OBSERVED / RECORDED THE MOMENT? )

*never met this person  
you call F o r C e r t a i n  
and not sure this F o r C e r t a i n  
would be qualified  
to observe or record  
when some O n e is asleep  
or just has their eyes closed*

is not a valid answer\*

\*Please enter a valid answer and try again.\*

—exit Poet

- \_\_\_\_\_



- M. Days later this poem appeared projected in the night  
in forced perspective on the curved exterior dome of  
the Gran Telescopio Canarias in the Canary Islands:

### WHERE THE WORDLESS NOTE STRIKES

—enter Astronomers

[ *summarizing* ]

Astronomers today release a report  
on effects of looking further away  
than we had ever before imagined.  
Comparisons: an animal at rest  
or a light as seen through grotto waters  
or through a cool blue chlorinated pool.

—enter Commissioners

*The Commission to Examine the Authenticity of God*  
has responded thus:

You've looked far too far away.  
You haven't looked *close* enough.  
You haven't looked *long* enough.  
You haven't looked *low* enough.  
Only the naked eye can spy  
the sheen of a naked eye  
blinking back. Close your eyes  
and you'll see the size of God,  
you'll see what the animal dreamt.

*The Commission to Authenticate an Atheist's First Prayer*  
also responded thus:

So long as you are careful,  
you may speak to the moon  
or speak past the moon  
or to the bright moonless night.  
Yes, nothing might happen,  
but something just might,  
depends how you count  
what is not caught by sight.  
Is the sweater unravelling?  
Is the knot not as tight?  
Did you ask for the answer  
or'd you *f o r f e i t* your fight?

Be cautious, new supplicant,  
your words eclipse sounds,  
they're roofless pits that never  
mean the same said out loud.  
Speak in the day. Say  
what you want to say,  
but as you're learning to pray,  
pray in the night.

—exeunt Commissioners & Astronomers

—enters a Poet

Where the wordless note struck  
I saw an eye that opened.  
It opens still, the pupil swelling  
ever larger. Swallows the *never* language,  
fixes the mind. I am fixed.

—exits a Theologian

- \_\_\_\_\_

N. And here is the most recent response, a guerilla-painted mural several storeys high on the east-facing side of an apartment block in Athens, *Dionysiou Areopagitou* 17, directly between the Acropolis Museum and the Theatre of Dionysus:

## GREAT EMPTY HALLWAY

—enters some One

Unfolds a small beating thought the size of a fist inside  
a blank sheet of paper and pours innumerable whispers  
into its percussive throb.

Prays it does not amount to a static fuzz  
but that a meaning would blossom and whisper back.

Waters the garden after work.  
Sees the heart in the kitchen window  
and can't help but come inside.  
( wordless growing )

Falls asleep in the great empty hallway  
and one day awakes to the noise of crying  
behind a door, a door that's at last unlocked.

Is wanted. Coos and cries. The word  
for breast and the word for breath. Two eyes,  
one from each side of the coin, minted  
in a roaring wind the one, a quiet fire the other.

Bundled by the hearth, already remembering.  
The sudden silence of a power outage.  
In only minutes the power returns.

Sick for work. The smell of the couch and the carpet  
and the cooking with fire. Wonders where it goes,  
the heat. Lets go of the remote control,  
batteries splayed across the floor.  
*Let's go to out and away and away ,*  
says gentle throb (asleep on your chest),  
says all at once in one pendulum note:

*let us rest in this room*  
*let us rest let us rest*  
*while the wordless voice drifts*  
*down the great empty hallway of*

- \_\_\_\_\_

- O. Last night I dreamt I'd been invited to *thee* virtual *Cat Café*. In the dream, my avatar comes to the café dressed in purple regalia.<sup>55</sup> A fluorescent green avatar with a lovely maternal build approaches me. She offers salutations in a language I don't understand.

I blurt out, "Isn't this virtual reality made of numbers and wouldn't it collapse without this *Never Man* you abhor?"

To which the avatar replies:

"Very good question, Joe. Yes and no. If we succeed, this space will live on like the ruins of the Agora. But we will have no need for virtual realities when *Never Man* is returned to his proper place. We will not live here, but only visit for kicks."

"You wouldn't tear it down?" I reply.

"Of course not, Joe. This is *L'Origine du monde*. The womb is glorious, but we're not meant to stay there."

"Well, why all the cats?"

"Because it's still a mystery which of us domesticated the other."

Hearing this, I look over at a small mirror on the opposite wall where my reflection flickers back and forth between being reversed and being correct. She locks eyes with me in the same mirror. I turn back to face her.

She pans over, placidly, slow as time, and peers into me, gives me her gaze—gently smiles into my watering eyes. We both whisper at once:

---

55 To show them how well I troll? Am I for or against them in this dream? I can't tell.

“In the bay window, where an animal dreamt, the question.”

Then I awoke.<sup>56</sup>

---

56 When I awoke I wrote some *radical centrist blah punditry* of my own, it poured out of me, you can take it or leave it:

The forty-something forward-minded progressive candidate for public office courts your vote and your support to fight for *words like you* and *words you like*. Before the revolving door of tomorrow's corporations, the Progressive pours forth the orotund chords for their orthodox chorus of torrid supporters to roar in one accord till their voices go hoarse. They're proposing reforms commanding decorum towards reordered and newly-recorded mores and folkways (formal & informal norms) and so forth. If these new words aren't enforced the whole earth will be scorched, no quarter for those who ignore us, and don't you dare brand us Orwellian.

Of course, the orator mustn't mention "the Poor" anymore. Why the hell for? It's not that our Progressive's ignoring us, it's just that never have more of us been such inglorious borrowers. If we endorsed relief for the poor, we might reveal just how poor and in debt we all are. Then the *Prophets* could no longer ignore the ordeals we abjure, they'd be forced to reorient our scores and restore all their formulas to be less ornamental, to more clearly portray how small our portion is and how clearly that portends our failure to pay. These corpses must purport some corpulence. We can't afford to have Standard & Poor's re-score our credit reports, then our creditors abort all forecasted lending and borrowing. Without their support we'd lose all rapport, have to forfeit our floor in the courts, we couldn't bring torts, our imports would dwarf our exports of course, markets would short us, perhaps more importantly we'd have to rely on military force, not sure how far that would shore us, we seem to lose all the wars we've been courting. Then what? Inflation soars. We're attacked by the poorer who envy our hoards. Ports and airports are lost in these wars. Then our ethernet cords. Then our keys to the corridors where

- P. I say unto you, there shall be more joy in heaven over one question interrogated than over ninety-and-nine answers. For ninety-and-nine men with all the answers, there is one that has questioned the questions.
- Q. In a rare blink of silence, under a mass house arrest, on the Ides of March, with his pilly purple sweater laying limply over the back of his chair, the theologian's zoom call freezes. Power outage. An uncanny hush sweeps over his home office. Dust sparkles in the air. He hears something he's not heard in many years:

---

the powerful sort out what's to our credit and what's in our interest.

So let's focus for now on identity wars through a war of words. We can fight for what's right like the right word for foreigners, and implore all our lenders (no matter their race, creed, or gender) to order around the poorest of us using words we don't find so horrible. You can keep growing your core while growing your border wall, just command us correctly and we'll give up the fortress and oracle, no matter how morbidly deplorable and ahistorical these inequities. No matter the cortisol coursing down our aortal walls. The puke in the toilet bowls. The blood in the urinals. We'll only orbit the issues that orbit the actual cornerstones, the gold in the vault, the system at fault, the property oriented court of law. The truly sore flaming ore imploding star all else orbits metaphorically has become the core we must ignore and can't explore lest we implode, the two most incorrigible sources: the hoarding of wealth and growth in itself.

Sorry, Joey, you poor kid, sorry for not being shorter winded. Sorry for rhyming—but I think rhyme comports the saddest parts with a touch of sport and euphoria. I know this sounds sordid, but more and more I simply exhort you to order your mind, find peace in the storm, find the Lord in your chores, find the first corner store, and play the damned lottery.



I heard God.  
God hummed, hummed his own hum, a different hum.

Then God spoke, said,

*TELL ME A JOKE.*

I said,

*God is in heaven and you are on Earth,  
so let your words be few.*

*THAT'S A GOOD ONE,*

said God,

*I'VE BROUGHT YOU A GIFT, CHILD,*

*LISTEN CAREFULLY:*

*I'VE RELEASED THE SPHINX.*

*SHE WILL VISIT YOU ALL,*

*WHILE YOU WAIT FOR YOUR STARTER TO BUBBLE,*

*WHILE THE LEAVEN RESTS OVERNIGHT,*

*WHILE THE LOAVES PROOF, RISE.*

*AND WHEN THE SPHINX FINDS YOU,*

*RIDDLES YOU, DEMANDS YOUR ANSWER,*

*HER PERFECT CLAWS—*

*GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE, IRON, STEEL*

*—FIRM AGAINST YOUR POUNDING CHEST,*

*HOLD YOUR TONGUE, CHILD.*

*STAY YOUR VOICE, DON'T EVEN HUM.*

*WAIT.*

*BASK IN THE SILENCE THAT POOLS IN HER GAZE  
AND KNEAD HER QUESTIONS IN YOUR INNERMOST ROOM.*

*THEN TURN AROUND, LEAVE THEBES BEHIND,  
TAKE THOSE QUESTIONS HOME WITH YOU.*

THEY ARE GIFTS, NOT DESPOTS.  
THEY'RE YOURS NOW. PLAY.  
TURN THEM INTO ART AND RETURN THEM  
TO YOUR LOVED ONES. SURE,  
YOU WON'T BE HAILED KING OF SOME KINGDOM,  
BUT YOU CAN KEEP YOUR EYES  
AND YOU CAN KEEP YOUR HEART.

*Easier said than done!*

GOOD ONE.

Then the power generators kicked in, and the whirr of  
the world swallowed them back up.



Vuvuzela manufacturers feel embattled despite record profits.



Blueprints for 3D printing your own vuvuzela are now available. You can print one yourself using graphene!

- A. Nobel prize winners and dollar-store barons have never been so in cahoots. Half of all dollar-store retail space has been converted to self-serve 3D printing terminals so the poor can be part of the magic.
- B. 3D printers cost about the same as a pure-bred Tibetan mastiff.
- C. Commerce is chiefly conducted through:
  - i. 3D printing files
  - ii. “dollar” stores
  - iii. Amazon.gov™
  - iv. “craft fairs” and “makers’ markets” and Bazaar3D.com™

- D. Buddy who started Bazaar3D.com™ was first-to-market with a web- and mobile-based marketplace platform for indie designers to sell their artisanal 3D printing files from home. He's worth as much as Bezos. Believe it or not, he's never created a 3D printing file in his life.

He's hailed a genius by the various gatekeepers. The *Prophets* calibrate their credibility algorithms by his every word. Some call him a revolutionary, in praise or disgust. Some call him the *Never Man*. He is a mighty philanthropist for the causes he cares about. He's the venture capital behind a Nobel laureate staffed R&D team building the first CRISPR-3D Printer hybrid console. Multiple sexual partners, including his estranged spouse, have joined voices on 16chan™ to allege he's a grower-not-a-shower.

He's the expert called by the House to testify before the Ethics Committee in the run-up to their bill to ban the 3D printing of vuvuzelas. It's been splashy news for the press to milk for listicles, but we all know it's pointless, there's nowhere near enough votes in the Senate.<sup>57</sup>

---

57    Whichever political party you think is which in this vuvuzela debate, 2015 Joey, it's probably the opposite. It's different now. And maybe it's all the *Pyrosophy* talk sawing through some kind of knot in me, but the more they war, the harder it is to explain how they're different. Many worry the vuvuzela debate will be the last thread and the match that lights it. In less spectacular news, another forest fire broke another record of some kind yesterday.



The path of least resistance is littered with vuvuzelas.

# T O S U M M A R I Z E

The future is annoying, Joe.<sup>58</sup>

---

58

As you no doubt see, young Joey, the end of this listicle  
races toward you, this final click a narrowing canal  
of its own. You're no doubt shaking these dispatches,  
in a knot to know what happens to you, to us, to know  
by which Sirens you've sailed or sunk, to know  
if you tumbled into this bathwater canal, to know  
if you washed up on shore, naked but alive, to know  
what only tomorrow should know.

Leave that for the *Never Man*, Joey. I suddenly  
remember myself murmuring "*What am I not telling me?*"  
Your new memories are fizzling through my mind!  
I remember you—me—beginning to scream this at our book.  
Is your rage giving way to fear? Has something  
unspeakable happened? Now you feel that  
*shame* creeping in, yes? It's frigid hand on your forehead,  
the bitter mirror unveiling. Maybe  
there's something in your teeth, yes? Your eye? A wound?  
I know I've tortured you with so many glaring omissions...  
I can hear you roaring across the chasm  
of this atomic~astronomic half decade:

"*WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?!*"

I'm so sorry Joe, but I am not our cat.

I can't tell, I can only show.

That's the only way we'll change our *heart*.

Besides, your mind was stronger than mine.

But worry not, if you've read carefully, you will sense  
what happens to people that don't climb off their throne  
and examine their shit

before it flushes away.

Do not be angry nor afraid nor ashamed. You are still alive.  
There are still people that love you. Besides, *you*  
are only made from other people, and this dispatch is for them.  
And if you heed any of this, these dispatches might evaporate  
in your very hands. Perhaps they already have. Perhaps,  
*suddenly*, I am not  
playing solitaire with a deck of Bruegel cards...

It whirrs idiotically  
like so many vuvuzelas and tilting turbines  
in the prairie wind, the countless rotary sanders  
hard at work, shrieking as they polish,  
as they lean into the rough, our rampant boos  
and applause fusing into one thunderous buzz,  
the squeak of 3D sneakers, the muffled leak  
from a billion earbuds, the bajillion stories  
on the 'gram. Everything is leaking.  
Every dispatch is leaked. Everyone seems  
happy to me, and the world is still here.  
We still drink Burgundy and spare change  
for the homeless. There's a lot of baby  
left in this bath water, and our baby  
still knows how to caterwaul for that sweet  
sweet milk. Don't give up on your dreams  
just yet.

I am no Jeremiah, and this is no jeremiad;  
I'm no Elisha, and I've no bear to maul  
our probably immortal youth;  
and I'm no Ezekiel either, but perhaps  
all these duly reported bones of contention  
will rattle and grow flesh.

I accidentally confessed this to Siri™  
( *I didn't know she was listening* )



— da•da —

“Sorry, Joe. I don't know what you mean.”

*Fin.*



*Oh yes, P.S., I almost forgot:  
At last, last night,  
the remnants of our scientific community  
had a chimp mate with a sex robot  
and a sex robot mate with a chimp.  
All we could do was watch,  
sick with envy. Strauss was playing too LOL  
Also Sprach Zarathustra ha ha ha.  
A gen-z BuzzFeed reviewer called it “the tits”—  
Now that’s content! [ SWEATY-SMILEY EMOJI ]*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LAUREN DERMAN was quite literally seated beside me while the vast majority of this book was penned. She graciously heard out my incessant musings, bounced ideas back and forth with me, and evaluated the flow of countless formulations with her well-trained, thespian's ear. Thank you, Lauren.

MALCOLM & KRISTA SCOTT, besides being steadfast friends and mentors and moral compasses to me since I was a youth, have for decades been the unwavering patrons of my creative endeavors. They've been the Medici, Borghese, and Sforza all rolled into one mega patron. I could never thank them enough.

LIZZIE DERKSEN has been my most faithful and trusted editor for years now and I would be an impoverished mess without her insights and dedication. Thank you for all your time and push-back and brilliance.

I owe thanks to several other astute writers who took time to review parts of this work or advise me professionally: KARLENE NICOLAJSSEN, GLORIA OLCHOWY-ROZEBOOM, OMAR MOUALLEM, MIKEY HAMM, MATT PRINS, COLBY CLAIR STOLSON, TOMAS ANDEL, and CURT HAUGAN.

I would be remiss not to note a handful of folks who've been there for me through thick and thin or have helped me grow intellectually, often both: MATTHEW HIRJI, MATTHEW MAZOWITA, NATHAN FOERGER, RICHARD WESTERMAN, TEDDY HOLTBY, MITCH HOLTBY, DOUG HOLTBY, CALEB CORMIER, JONEK HYDZIK, DEREK ANTON, DYLAN HOWARD, MICHAEL DERMAN, JORDAN CLEMENS, HANNAH BRAUN, DAVID GOA, ARIANE HANEMAAYER, ZOHREH BAYATRIZI, RILEY MAGGS, OBED VELASQUEZ, MY PARENTS, and BETHANY CORMIER.

This should go without saying, but in the fraught discursive landscape of 2020, it feels incumbent on me to note: *The fine human beings here listed do not necessarily espouse whatever views this book contains. In fact it's impossible to suss out which, if any, are the beliefs of your author rather than those of his characters.*